

# A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HOBBS' MORAL PHILOSOPHY

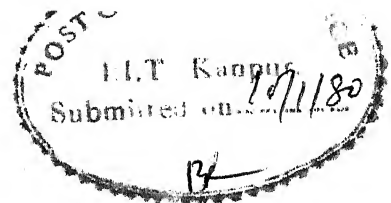
A Thesis Submitted  
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

*By*  
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*to the*


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JANUARY, 1980

CERTIFICATE



This is to certify that the thesis 'A Critical Analysis of Hobbes' Moral Philosophy', submitted by Renu Khanna in partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, is a record of bonafide research work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. The results embodied in the thesis have not been submitted to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

January 1980

  
(S.A. Shaida )

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This is to certify that Renu Khanna has satisfactorily completed all the course requirements for the Ph.D. programme in Philosophy. The courses include:

H-Phi. 751 Twentieth Century Philosophy  
H-Phi. 753 Modern Logic  
H-Phi. 757 Moral Judgement  
H-Phi. 769 Indian Philosophy I  
H-Phi. 772 Ethical Theories  
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H-Phi. 774 Social and Political Philosophy  
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## SYNOPSIS

### A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HOBBS' MORAL PHILOSOPHY

- A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Renu Khanna to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

Hobbes's philosophy has been discussed by many philosophers and it is generally criticized for having upheld an egoistic nature of human being as well as an egoistic moral theory. In this inquiry we have examined Hobbes's views and have tried to show the sense in which he accepts the egoistic nature of man.

The **first chapter** is largely an account of the conditions which have influenced Hobbes. We observe that certain special social, political and religious factors and the intellectual atmosphere of England of those times have highly motivated him to write his works. It is observed that Hobbes was influenced by philosophers and social **thinkers** like Epicurus, Augustine, Machiavelli, Calvin, and scientists like Kepler and Galileo. Above all, among the established sciences, it was geometry which influenced him the most.

In the second chapter we have examined whether Hobbes is an egoist. We have concluded that in the state

of nature he accepts psychological egoism when he says that man by nature moves towards his self-interest; but when man establishes a commonwealth and surrenders some of his natural rights, he takes a turn towards rule-utilitarianism. Hobbes never says that in the civil state people should act according to the consequences of those actions, rather he argues that people should act according to the rules, and these rules are established by the sovereign. These rules are the measure of what is right and wrong and are established on the ground of what is needful and perspicuous for men.

We have given an analysis of some of the moral concepts used by Hobbes in the third chapter. These are: 'good', 'right', 'wrong', 'obligation' and 'justice'. In the state of nature concepts of good and evil are used relatively and subjectively. What is good for a person is decided by him only. In civil state good becomes objective. What is good is judged according to the rules, and the good of one individual is generally not different from that of others.

Right and wrong have no place in the state of nature, but they acquire their proper significance in the civil state.

We have seen that Hobbes accepts two kinds of obligations: inforo interno and inforo externo. Inforo interno obligation is present in the state of nature, but inforo externo which is an external obligation arises only when there is someone to enforce it. All obligations are conditional and self-imposed in the sense that people make covenants and lay down their rights on the grounds that peace will be established.

There is nothing like just and unjust in the state of nature. The dependence of justice upon the existence of a sovereign is supposed by him. For Hobbes, justice consists in equal distribution or to give whatever is one's own. This distributive justice he calls equity. He accepts utilitarian concept of justice.

His theory of moral language is brought out in the fourth chapter. In this context we observe that Hobbes comes quite close to the modern conception of philosophy; Hobbes' idea of moral language comes from the special uses of language. These speeches are not propositions, but are commands, requests, advice etc. For Hobbes, the nature of moral language has some feature of indicative utterances though primarily it is prescriptive as well as optative. The latter feature includes various emotive uses of moral language. We have examined that the expressions of passions

are not signifying our conceptions, but they are also used to perform some action. When I say 'I promise' I am performing an act of promising. Thus, Moral judgements are performative utterances; if I say an action 'X is good' then I am not just stating the fact that X is good, but at the same time I am prescribing the performance of X to other people. The function of moral judgement is to direct people and this cannot be done by a descriptive statement.

In the final chapter an attempt has been made to critically evaluate Hobbes's ethical position in the light of the new points that have been brought out through the analysis and interpretations made in the earlier chapters. For the sake of facilitation the major conclusions of the earlier chapters have been reintroduced. We observe that Hobbes explains the nature of ethical concepts very competently but he fails to bring home the language of passions with the clarity which he displays with regard to other issues. He is not inconsistent with his view that man is egoistic and yet he surrenders his private interest for the common good. He does not make a clear distinction between civil laws and moral laws as he fails to maintain the distinction between legal and moral obligations. The charge that Hobbes introduces the totalitarian elements in

his theory cannot be sustained at the theoretical plane, though a government founded on the consent of the sovereign will be certainly better. Hobbes is not in a good position to answer what one should do when there is conflict of rules, though there is every possibility of developing his position to answer this question. Hobbes has the credit of synthesizing the prescriptivity of moral language with the utilitarian theory of ethics whereby moral prescriptions are grounded in objective and universalizable rules of public utility.

## CHAPTER I

### HOBBES AND HIS BACKGROUND : AN ACCOUNT OF INTELLECTUAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES

Hobbes' ideas were the outcome of the political, social and intellectual atmosphere of England in late 16th and early 17th centuries. These conditions exerted major influence on Hobbes' thought. All the writings of Hobbes were published during the period 1642 to 1658 and that period was very crucial in British history. Though Hobbes had first decided to write a treatise on physical nature followed by one on human nature and finally on society, the prevalent conditions arising out of political situation, i.e. the near-anarchic disagreement between Charles I and the Parliament prompted him to write on society first.

Machiavelli's ideas which were expressed a century before these civil wars, were still influential. Machiavelli's ideal was a united independent and sovereign Italian nation, absolutely free from the domination of the Church in politics, science and religion. He expressed his thoughts for a rational commonwealth and he criticized the ecclesiastical politics of that time. Though Machiavelli had separated politics from morals, Hobbes' moral and political philosophy were dependent upon each other. Hobbes' sovereign was not based on divine laws, as Bodin had done it, but his



sovereignty was all powerful and unlimited.

Hobbes was impressed by Augustine's, Machiavelli's and Calvin's ideas that disorder in state can be rectified only through action informed by knowledge i.e., if we have knowledge of why certain things happen we know the truth about them.

Besides political revolution, in the intellectual atmosphere of the 16th and 17th centuries there was going to be a radical change as several theories, one after another, were presented by different scientists. Kepler and Galileo appeared on the intellectual scene. What Copernicus had presented was now refined by Kepler and particularly by Galileo. Galileo assumed that by using the model of geometry for his reasoning about astronomy, he could demonstrate the accuracy of his conclusions if he could produce basic axioms from which he could deduce his conclusions. Galileo gave a method which, in their own ways, Bacon had attempted and Descartes had carried on. These people believed that truth will be discovered by taking the information received through observation and organizing it into a system of axioms.

Hobbes was impressed by these ideas. He assumed that the method of observation and deductive reasoning from axioms which are formed from observations would yield exact knowledge. He said - "The first beginnings... of knowledge, are the

phantasms of sense and imagination; and that there be such phantasms we know well enough by nature; but to know why they be, or from what causes they proceed, is the work of ratiocination; which consists in composition, and division or resolution."<sup>1</sup>

Hobbes explains both physical and mental events as nothing more than bodies in motion. The thing that is moving is changing its place and whatever is caused to move changes its place. If something is at rest, it will always be at rest unless something moves it. Hobbes says:

When a body is once in motion, it moves (unless something else hinders it), eternally; and whatsoever hinders it, cannot in an instant, but in time, and by degrees, quite extinguish it; and as we see in the water, though the wind cease, the waves give not over rolling for a long time after: so also it happens in that motion, which is made in the internal parts of a man, then, when he sees, dreams, etc.<sup>2</sup>

All kinds of natural processes are because of motion. Things become different as they have been moved by something.

Thus, Hobbes finds the first principle for our reasoning in motion. He divides the system of

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1. Thomas Hobbes - Elements of Philosophy Concerning Body, English Work, Vol. I, (ed.) Sir William Moles Worth, London: Bohn, 1841, (hereafter referred to as EW ), p.66.
  2. Hobbes, Leviathan (hereafter, Lev), EW, Vol. III, p.4.

philosophy in three parts - (1) Physics, dealing with natural bodies, (2) Moral philosophy, dealing with the dispositions and manner of human beings, and (3) Political philosophy, dealing with the artificial body called society or the state.

Perception, imagination, memory and reasoning are nothing but simply motions in body. Seeing an object is a perception and the retention of the image after the object is removed, is called imagination, that is, 'decaying sense'. When later we wish to express this sense we have memory. Reasoning is nothing but adding and subtracting of consequences of general names. "For reason, in this sense, is nothing but reckoning, that is adding and subtracting, of the consequences of general names agreed upon for the marking and signifying of our thoughts."<sup>3</sup> These names which are imposed on things arbitrarily by men, are used to recall their sensations, and to convey others our thoughts. Science and knowledge are possible only when we have these names, since in the right definition of names lies the first use of speech which is the acquisition of science. These words represent our experiences, and to gain true knowledge we must know what every name we use stands for and how to use it properly, because the 'true' and 'false' are attributes of speech and not of things.

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3. Ibid., p.30.

Science is based on experiences, and we represent our experience through words. Thus to express our experience correctly we must know the proper use of names. For Hobbes, there are universal names, but they do not signify anything. They are just names. Hobbes accepts nominalism i.e. the view that universals are nothing but names.

Hobbes compares linguistic truth with the truth of geometry. In geometry something is true according to the definition given to it. Similarly, in case of linguistic truth, he holds that a proposition is true if the names used in it are in accordance with the definition given to them. Hobbes laid great emphasis on the need for correct definitions and linguistic clarity.

Hobbes differs from Bacon in his view concerning the applicability of the method of science to philosophising. Bacon adopted only the inductive method, whereas, Hobbes adopts mainly the deductive method. In fact, we may say that his method is partly synthetic and partly analytic i.e. we may proceed from experience to principles (analysis ) or from primary proposition to conclusions (synthesis).

Since geometry was the only body of knowledge that was accepted as science in those days, Hobbes held that in order to be a science, reasoning must start from true principles and not, from experience only, as mere experience

is not science. Hobbes does not say that the task of philosophy is to explain the true nature of reality; philosophical reasoning is not based on sense experience but philosophy seeks that truth which consists of linguistic entities. Hobbes used geometry, as a model for his philosophy, but how far did he succeed in his aim, cannot be easily ascertained. When he talks about politics there also he uses this model. He says:

The skill of making, and maintaining commonwealths, consists in certain rules, as doth airthmetic and geometry; not as tennis-play, on practice only: which rules, neither poor men have the leisure, nor men that have had the leisure, have hitherto had the curiosity, or the method to find out.<sup>4</sup>

The following quotation from Hobbes also suggests that Hobbes had a conception of philosophy which brought it very near to science:

Philosophy is such knowledge of effects or appearances, as we acquire by true ratiocination from the knowledge we have first of their causes or generation; and again, of such causes or generations as may be from knowing first their effects.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Hobbes attempted to derive everything from geometry and mechanics. As it is believed, he considered

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4. Ibid., p.195.

5. Elements of Philosophy, EW , Vol. I, p.3.

human being also as a machine which operates deterministically. Man's sensations, emotions or feelings are nothing but motions in his body. These motions are of two kinds - vital motion and voluntary motion. Vital motions begin with the process of birth and continue through the whole life. Pulse, breathing, concoction, nutrition, excretion etc., are such motions. The other is animal motion such as speech, movement of any of our limbs, they all being movements first in our minds. Imagination is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion. The motions are called endeavour when they are in body but not yet appeared in acts like walking, speaking, going etc. "These small beginnings of motion, within the body of man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking and other visible actions, are commonly called ENDEAVOUR"<sup>6</sup>.

According to Hobbes, man is a part of nature and his actions may be brought under the concept of necessity. But at the same time, liberty and necessity are consistent. Hobbes does not accept the predictability of human actions. He merely asserts that whatever happens does not prevent necessary events from being also voluntary actions. All are

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6. EW, Vol. III, p.39.

necessary in the sense that whatever happens is in accordance with the will of God. Hobbes' determinism tells us that every event has a cause. But in the class of causes there are human desires too. Hobbes believed that human passions can be controlled by rewards and punishments. Human actions can be blamed and praised. Hobbes believed in moral freedom in a practical sense. Man is morally free to do what he wills. If a person has killed some other person, that does not mean that he cannot be blamed, on the ground that actions are 'necessary'. Hobbes holds that man is totally responsible for his actions and that he can be punished for all his actions which are morally wrong.

Hobbes explains his concept of human freedom by explaining his concept of endeavour. Endeavours, he says, are the small beginnings of motion. When the endeavour is toward something which causes it, **it is called appetite**, or desire. Endeavour is taken as a force that moves one for actions. It is not an instantaneous speed, but the pressure or motive force behind the movement, rather than the movement itself.

A man is always free to act voluntarily (only in certain circumstances he is externally bound e.g. when he is in a prison which is an external impediment). External impediments, though they reduce his power to do some action,

do not deprive his freedom. A man's freedom is reduced if something external opposes his endeavour-initiated behaviour, but not if something external alters the endeavour itself without opposing the behaviour initiated by his new endeavour. In Hobbes' view, however, a man acts according to the endeavour which is dominant.

According to Hobbes man's will appears in two forms - appetite and aversion. Man's appetite is always towards a thing which is conducive to his life and one's aversion is away from that which harms him. Man, in the state of nature, decides what is good and what is bad for him according to these appetites and aversions. As he says:-

Whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calls good; and the object of his hate and aversion, evil... For these words of good, evil... are **ever** used with relation to the person that uses them; there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man, where there is no common wealth; or in a commonwealth, from the person that represents it. 7

In order to understand what does Hobbes mean by good in the state of nature and in the state of commonwealth, we must see the distinction that Hobbes makes between these two states.

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7. Ibid., p.41.



The state of nature is a state of war, which is a condition of anarchy, an absence of government. What gives Hobbes, the idea of the state of nature, is not history, but the condition of England when he was writing his works. During that period England was in a state of anarchy, there was utter chaos, and no authority to establish peace. Hobbes identifies his state of nature with England's state of civil war. Hobbes understands that in the state of nature there is struggle for power, glory and security. Each man competes with all other men, since they all are equal in strength, for the power to preserve himself and live well. There is continual suspicion, fear of violence and death. In this state there are neither rights nor (consequently) any violation of rights; or we can say everyone has right to everything even to one another's body, nor there are any duties, responsibilities or values etc.

Commonwealth is established when men see that it is impossible for them to survive long in the state of nature. They make a covenant and establish the sovereign.

Hobbes rejects Aristotle's view that man is a social animal, that man forms society because of his nature. According to him man is a self-centred egoist by nature. Competition for riches, honour and power inclines man to contention, enmity and war. The view that man is an egoist and hedonist

is arrived at by Hobbes from his psychological theory where he holds that man always desires pleasure (in his words 'felicity') and avoids pain. Felicity, he says, is that which the ancient philosophers have called ultimate end ('utmost aim'). For Hobbes, there is nothing like an ultimate end. When we live we have desires, and desires always have some end. For him felicity is a continual delight. It is a dynamic and not a static condition. Pleasurable condition is not a state of satiety. Felicity consists not in having prospered, but in prospering. As Hobbes says:-

Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter.<sup>8</sup>

Hobbes was not the founder of this pleasure-pain (Hedonistic) theory. He was influenced by Epicurus who had said in his book, (there are evidences that Hobbes had read it) that man's nature is bent upon pleasure - "We call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard

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8. Ibid., p.85.

by which we judge every good"<sup>9</sup>.

Besides being an egoist, Hobbesian man is rational also. He knows that his aim of preserving his life cannot be achieved in the state of war, so his fear of death makes him follow the 'dictates of reason'. These dictates of reason are 'laws of nature' which indicate that there should be a state of peace and that every man should seek peace.

These 'laws of nature' cannot be followed in the state of nature, since there is no coercive power to enforce them. Unless these rules are agreed upon and enforced by the power of government, it would be foolish for an individual to try to abide by them; for in doing so, he would risk his well-being and his life, and such risk is contrary to the most important of all the laws of nature i.e., the fear of death and the desire for self-preservation. These laws in the state of nature oblige only inforo interno and in the state of commonwealth inforo externo i.e. they are enforced externally by the sovereign.

Thus according to Hobbesian psychology there are two things in human nature - reason and instinct. In the state

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9. Epicurus, - Epicurus: The Extant Remains, trans. by Cyril Bailey (Oxford) Clarendon Press, 1926, p.127. James Jay Hamilton in his note 'Hobbes's, study and the Hardwick Library' (Journal of the History of Philosophy Vol. XVI Oct. 1978) gives a list of the books which Hobbes had read.

of nature man is guided by his instinct- whatever he desires is good and what he hates is evil. But as a rational being he realizes that survival or self-preservation requires giving up the total freedom of the state of nature and submitting to one authority. Therefore, all men by their common consent make an agreement which is a social contract in which each man in effect says - "I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him and authorize all his actions in like manner"<sup>10</sup>.

This created entity is called a commonwealth, the multitude united in one person. The performance of these agreements (covenants) is expected only when there is some coercive power, as otherwise people will not fulfil their covenants. The sovereign is considered as an authority as long as he is able to protect common interests. His aim is to bring about the common benefit and defence. The concept of utility and common benefit was present in Hobbes' philosophy. It was he, and not Bentham and Mill, who first declared that man should act according to those rules and principles which are made by the sovereign for the common benefit and utility of those living in that community. Two

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10. Lev., EW , Vol. III, p.158.

centuries before the modern utilitarians, Hobbes had based his social system on the doctrine of utility, which later on Bentham and Mill followed. In more recent years, this theory found new proponents in men like Austin and others.

These laws which are common for all people are civil laws which the commonwealth commands to make the distinction between right and wrong.

But how can one be sure that the sovereign would seek the interests of his subject? Hobbes says that the sovereign has a duty to promote the advantage of the members of the community. There is no conflict between the subjects and the sovereign's interest. The sovereign, by the mutual consent of the people, has been entrusted with the task of safeguarding and promoting the interests of the subjects who also give him the power and authority to legislate and enforce the laws on them. The subjects at the same time individually desire their own respective goods and also realise that their own peace and security depends upon the fact that they follow the rules. Here Hobbes and later utilitarians follow the same assumption that to establish common good there should not be any conflict between public and private good.

The concept of the political authority in Hobbes, is quite different from the then prevalent concept of political authority in which the King receives his authority

from God and not from the people of that community.

Though Hobbes believes that the government should be established by all the people, yet he says that it would be better if a single ruler has got this power. He prefers the form of government which is called monarchy. According to him the sovereign power should be absolute and undivided. Hobbes was anti-parliamentarian. He also believed that no religious authority should interfere in any of the political matters. Hobbes' ideas against parliament and church were criticized vehemently. His views were opposed both by religious and civil authorities, which caused Hobbes' flight to France during the civil war.

Hobbes holds, as Marsilio said, that church has no coercive power. The clergy which is also a class of community which performs religious service, is subject to regulation like any other class and is amenable to the civil courts for violations of human law. Hobbes' theory of absolute sovereignty was the response to the political anarchy of his time. Hobbes opposed the division of powers and said that there would have been no civil war in England if the sovereignty was not divided between the King, Lords and Commons. For him, at least theoretically, the possibility remains that the absolute sovereign, if he fails in providing protection and peace to the people, can be dismissed on the

ground that he does not perform his duty.

Although Hobbes did not gain much approval in his time, some of his ideas were accepted by later thinkers. His theory of utility was followed by Bentham and Mill. Lord Kames also accepted some of his principles. He agreed with Hobbes that the love for life is the strongest of all instincts. Without justice and other virtues there could be no society. The various principles of actions are ordered to promote the general good. Kames accepts that the good of individuals is principally trusted to their own case. He holds that we act for the general good though that is not our immediate aim.

Hobbes' theory of social contract was approved by Locke and Rousseau. Locke's description of social contract is quite similar to Hobbes'. He says -

Wherever therefore, any number of men so unite into one society, as to quit everyone his executive power of the law of Nature, to resign it to the public, there and there only, is political, or civil society.<sup>11</sup>

With such a contract one authorizes others to make laws which one agrees to obey. And these laws are meant to

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11. Locke, J. : Second Treatise of Civil Government, (The library of Liberal Arts, Indiana polis: Bobbs Merrill, Inc.) Ch. 2, Para 4.

preserve one's life, liberty and property.

Hobbes and Rousseau, agree on the point that social contract is a process whereby each individual gives up his independence on the condition that all his fellow citizens do the same. Rousseau says:-

Each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody, and as there is no associate over which he does not acquire the same right as he yields others over himself, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has.<sup>12</sup>

It is the social contract which brings political authority into being.

When we evaluate Hobbes' philosophy we find that his emphasis on stability and security is understandable since in his time England's political and social situation was totally chaotic. And once we accept his theory of man and his psychological egoism, his conclusions appear to be reasonable.

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12. Rousseau, J.J.: The Social Contract, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.), 1948, Ch. VI, p.110.



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## CHAPTER II

### HOBBS : AN EGOIST OR A UTILITARIAN?

In this chapter we will discuss the position of Hobbes on the question - whether every person acts only for the good of himself or he acts otherwise also? There are two main theories about performing an action -

(1) We perform an action not because it produces good consequences but because that act is good in itself. The action is performed by someone as a duty.

(2) We perform an action because of the better consequences it produces. This theory falls into two species:-

(a) A person performs an action because that action maximizes his own enjoyment i.e. the action is in his interest. If so, he is called an egoist.

(b) If by performing an action it is intended to produce more good in general than any other possible good (including the good of the agent), this is called utilitarianism.

Now let us see what are Hobbes' views on this question. Generally Hobbes is considered to be an egoist by most of the writers on ethics. As Roger says:

He (Hobbes) assumes that the content of the good at which every person aims is the preservation of

his own physical life and the enjoyment of pleasure. The narrowness of this view leads to the negative conclusion that men never desire the good of others; a doctrine false to human nature and one of the most serious defects in Hobbes' psychology.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly Sidgwick observes:

From an ethical point of view... its (i.e. of Hobbism) theoretical basis is the principle of egoism.<sup>2</sup>

We will see how far such interpretations of Hobbes' moral philosophy as a species of egoism are correct.

In order to see whether Hobbes is an egoist and if he is, then whether he is a psychological egoist or an ethical egoist, we must first distinguish between psychological egoism and ethical egoism.

The psychological egoist maintains that all men are selfish, or that the only motive from which anyone acts is self interest. We might characterize the psychological egoist as claiming that the only motive anyone has in performing a given action is that the action in question will result in more good for him than any other possible action. Not only people do act for their self-interest but they can't act otherwise. Broad while discussing psychological egoism in his essay, 'Egoism as a Theory of human motives',

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1. Rogers - Short History of Ethics, (Macmillan, 1948) p.137
  2. Sidgwick - Outlines of the History of Ethics, (Macmillan, 5th edition, 1902), p.169.

says that it is possible that all human motives are ultimately egoistic but it is not possible that all egoistic motives are ultimately of one kind. Egoistic motives can be of different kinds. They can be self-confined, self-centered, self-regarding or self-referential. He says that every motive which can act on a person has one or another of a large number of different kinds of special references to that person. All the various kinds of egoistic desires ~~can~~<sup>not</sup> be reduced to a single ultimate egoistic desire. They are often mixed up with each other. Broad says that it is not true that the only ultimate self-confined motive is the desire for one's own happiness. He rather argues that self-confined motives can be of different kinds. Self-preservation also comes among the self-confined motives. There are self-regarding motives which are self-centered but not self-confined, and they are also egoistic.<sup>3</sup>

Looking into Hobbes' position we see that when men act egoistically there is not one kind of motive behind that. He says: "... the voluntary acts of every man is the object, some to himself".<sup>4</sup> This shows that he acts for his own good but

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3. Broad, C.D. : Broad's Critical Essays in Moral Philosophy, (ed.) D.R.Cheney (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971), pp. 247-261.

4. Lev., E W , Vol. III, p. 120.

this good can be of any kind.

Ethical egoist believes that the rightness or wrongness of every action is a function of those consequences affecting only the agent himself. One ought always to act in a manner that may promote one's own greatest good.

The distinction between psychological egoism and ethical egoism is that psychological egoists maintain that people do act selfishly, but ethical egoists on the other hand, maintain that people ought to act selfishly.

In the light of this distinction we may see whether Hobbes is a psychological egoist or an ethical egoist. According to Hobbes men always act in order to attain some good or to avoid some evil. The following passage will make this point clear:-

Among so many dangers therefore, as the natural lusts of men do daily threaten each other withal, to have a care of one's self is so far from being a matter scornfully to be looked upon, that one has neither the power nor wish to have done otherwise. For every man is desirous of what is good for him, and shuns what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death and this he does by a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Hobbes : Phil. Rudiments Concerning Govt. & Society,  
E W , Vol. II, p.8.

From the above passage we can conclude that Hobbes is a psychological egoist. He does not state that all men are obligated to act selfishly, nor does he prescribe it as a duty. Hobbes says that no one has either the power or the desire to refrain from looking after his own interest. As for example, when he talks about gift he says - "No man gives but with intention of good to himself; because gift is voluntary; and of all voluntary acts, the object is to every man his own good."<sup>6</sup>

Men desire not only for the present good but they have the desire for future good also and to acquire this there arises "... a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceases only in death."<sup>7</sup>

Hobbes maintains that in a natural state, men are equal in power and under these conditions, the competition eliminates virtually all chances for an individual to achieve happiness, and it threatens his very survival.

According to Hobbes man never acts unselfishly. When he transfers his right to someone then also he expects some good to himself. He argues:

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6. Lev., EW, Vol. III, p.138.

7. Ibid., p.85-86.

... the motive, and end for which this renouncing and transferring of right is introduced, is nothing else but the security of man's person, in his life, and in the means of so preserving life, as not to be weary of it.<sup>8</sup>

Since all voluntary actions of men tend to their own preservation or pleasure, it cannot be reasonable to aim at anything else. In the state of nature, the first and the only rule of life is self-protection and men have a natural right to do anything which serves this end. Society comes into being only because of self-interest and fear and not out of natural feeling for one's fellow man. He says:

... all society is either for gain or for glory; that is not so much for love of our fellows, as for the love of ourselves.<sup>9</sup>

Hobbes never says that people ought to act for their own interest. He makes the factual statement that people do act only in their own interest. For him this truth is so evident that it does not need any explanation. At this point someone may ask: If the sole aim of man's life is self-preservation then which of the following two possibilities does Hobbes accept?

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8. Ibid., p.120.

9. Phil. Rudiments... EW, Vol. II, p.5.

(1) Man is selfish but not always, and he goes against the interest of other persons only when his own interest is found to be incompatible with that of others. Nevertheless, the overriding motive of all acts, for Hobbes remains self-preservation.

(2) Man is selfish and to fulfill his self-interest he always tries to harm others. There is always a competition.

Hobbes, in a particular context, holds the second possibility though elsewhere he accepts the first one. But to prove this we will have to first see the distinction between his state of nature and the state of commonwealth.

The state of nature is a state of struggle and competition. All men are equal by nature and everyone has a right to everything. It is a state of absolute freedom. Men have a right to do and say what they want. Since all men are equal, their interests are always in conflict with the interests of the others and, therefore, if two men desire the same thing they become enemies provided both of them cannot attain it. Thus, to preserve oneself one has to destroy or subdue another and hence comes a state of war. In this state of war there are three principal causes of quarrel. The first is competition, the second, diffidence and the third, glory. The first makes men invade for gain; the second for safety and the third for reputation. When there is a war of



each man against every man and there is no common power to keep them all in awe, there is no place for industry. '... no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.'<sup>10</sup>

In the state of nature there is nothing like right and wrong, just and unjust. There is no distinction of mine and thine but all that is important is to every man what he can get and for so long as he can keep it.

But man does not like to remain always in the state of nature. He desires peace because of the fear of death and the desire for such things as are necessary to commodious living. Thus men establish a commonwealth; which is a state of peace and security. Commonwealth is established when a multitude of men make a covenant and they agree to the observation of justice and other laws of nature. All men surrender some of their natural rights and they authorize the sovereign to govern them. The sovereign is instituted to secure people's interests and to establish peace.

The sovereign power can be attained in two ways, characterized by Hobbes as sovereign by institution and the

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10. Lev., EW, Vol. III, p.113.

sovereign by acquisition.

Sovereign by institution is "when men agree amongst themselves, to submit to some man, or assembly of men, voluntarily, on confidence to be protected by him against all others".<sup>11</sup>

Sovereign by acquisition is attained by natural force; "as when a man makes his children, to submit themselves, and their children to his government, as being able to destroy them if they refuse; or by war subdues his enemies to his will, giving them their lives on that condition."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the difference between the sovereign by institution and the sovereign by acquisition is that the latter is acquired by force and the former is established by making an agreement. In case of sovereign by acquisition, the sovereign does what he wishes to do. He doesn't consider his subjects' will. The subjects obey the sovereign on the condition that their life will be spared until they obey the sovereign's commands. In this kind of sovereignty the relationship between subject and the sovereign is like the relationship between the slave and the master. A slave

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11. Ibid., p.159.

12. Ibid., p. 159.

has to do what his master commands him to do. There is no question of what he himself wants to do.

But in the case of the sovereign by institution (though the sovereign here also is all powerful) it is instituted on the condition that he will act for the benefit of the people concerned. As it is established by the people, his will is not separated from the people's will.

Hobbes believes in the sovereign by institution where people make an agreement and establish some laws and rules and people have to act according to them.

Why we say that in the state of nature Hobbes accepts the second possibility can be seen now. Hobbes says that the way of one's competition to the attainment of his desire is to kill, subdue, supplant, or repel the other. In order to attain his interest man has to increase his power because life is a competition where the stronger gets the advantage. Men are naturally equal, "... the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest."<sup>13</sup> They all are equal in the faculties of mind and body. No man has such power that would make him secure in the struggle of the 'state of nature'; when there is war of every man against every man, the notions of right

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13. Ibid., p.110.

and wrong, just and unjust have no place. What a person desires is good for him and what he avoids is evil. The appetites and aversions are the voluntary motions, they signify the motions, one of approaching, the other of retiring.

When we have a desire for something then the appearance of this desire is called pleasure or delight. Pleasure arises because of the hope of the attainment of something that is good. Therefore pleasure is the appearance of good i.e. we are pleased only when we know that we are getting something good.

Pleasure is inseparably associated with desire. We desire what is good and we know that it will please us. Pleasure is not the ultimate end, it is a kind of desire which presupposes a further desire i.e. every pleasure follows another pleasure, there being no end to it. Hobbes argues - "Felicity by which we mean continual delight, consists not in having prospered, but in prospering".<sup>14</sup> Felicity is a pleasurable condition and it is a dynamic, not a static condition. Felicity is what many philosophers have accepted as an utmost end.

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14. EW, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 33.

Hobbes takes a hedonistic view while talking about good. He admits that object of our appetite is good, and pleasure is the appearance of good. Where there is pleasure there is good. In his words:

All appetite, desire, and love, is accompanied with some delight more or less, and all hatred and aversion, with more or less displeasure and offence.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, for Hobbes all those things which we desire are good. In the state of nature, private appetite is the measure of good or evil. Man himself decides what is good for him as a means and as an end. He is interested only in his own welfare and not in that of whole mankind. In such a state there is "No mine and thine distinction; but only that to be every man's that he can get; and for so long as he can keep it."<sup>16</sup>

The possibility of his getting out of this nature is the fear of death, desire of comfort and other commodities which man would like to have. For this, reason suggests convenient articles of peace which he calls the laws of nature. "A law of nature is a precept found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive

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15. EW, Vol. III, p.42.

16. Ibid., p.115.

of his life or takes away the means of preserving the same..."<sup>17</sup>  
The law of nature consists not in consent of men, but in reason. For Hobbes, the laws of nature are not mere mutually agreed upon covenants but are the only rational or reasonable norms of behaviour that are consequent upon the rational acceptance of self-preservation or avoidance of death. Here obviously, Hobbes is using the term reason in the sense of practical reason. "... there can therefore be no other law of nature than reason, nor no other precepts of natural law, than those which declare unto us the ways of peace, where the same may be obtained and of defence where it may not."<sup>18</sup>  
These laws are called moral laws also, "... because they concern the manners and conservation of men, one towards another."<sup>19</sup>

These laws of nature tell us how men should behave. The first and fundamental law of nature is, to seek peace and follow it. Peace makes self-protection easy. The other law of nature followed by peace is to lay down the right to all things. Whatever you require that other men should do to you, you do to them. These rights are laid either by

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17. Ibid., pp. 116-117.

18. Hobbes - Elements of Law , EW, Vol. IV, Part II, p.87.

19. Ibid., p.111.

renouncing or by transferring them. The mutual transferring of rights is called contract. These contracts are made between man and man but these contracts "... without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."<sup>20</sup>

Therefore we need a common power to keep people in awe. This common power is an artificial construction and it is constructed on the principle that "... peace is good, and therefore also the way, or means of peace, which, are justice, gratitude, modesty, equity, mercy and the rest of the laws of nature, are good."<sup>21</sup>

Observance of these virtues and the performance of the covenants make people confer all power and strength upon one man or one assembly of men. In ~~these~~ covenants every man, so to speak, says to every man - "I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or that assembly of men, on this condition, that you give up your right to him, and authorise all his actions in like manner."<sup>22</sup>

The establishment of a commonwealth is not incompatible with Hobbes' psychological egoism and the concept of self-

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20. Lev., EW , Vol. III, p.154.

21. Ibid., p.146.

22. Ibid., p.158.

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preservation because the sole aim of establishing a commonwealth is to secure and protect man's interest and institute peace. But Hobbes argues that no man gives up his right of self-preservation. A person can refuse to obey or violate the laws if they threaten his existence. In other words, Hobbes asserts that the laws of the commonwealth are binding on men as long as the state takes care of the interest of the subjects. Moreover, the ruler draws his power from the subjects who have, by mutual consent, delegated their powers to the ruler on the sole condition that he would ensure their protection and peace.

When the sovereign is established, moral virtues such as justice, equity, mercy etc. come into being and civil laws or legal sanctions are also established. These laws are the commands of the sovereign and every citizen is obliged to obey them. According to Hobbes:

... as men, for the attaining of peace, and conservation of themselves thereby, have made an artificial man, which we call a commonwealth; so also have they made artificial chains, called civil laws, which they themselves, by mutual covenants, have fastened at one end, to the lips of that man, or assembly, to whom they have given the sovereign power; and at the other end to their own ears.<sup>23</sup>

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23. Ibid., p.198.



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It follows that where there is no sovereign, there is no law. Hobbes nevertheless affirmed that even in the state of nature men have knowledge of the natural law and the necessity of natural law is also realized. But in the state of nature it lacks the bindingness which in fact makes it a law. Only after there is a sovereign **can there** be a legal order, because only then there is someone who has got the power to enforce the laws. Justice and morality begin with the sovereign. Hobbes like Machiavelli assumes that state of nature is a state of moral vacuum. Justice means obeying the law. To keep the contract in which you agree to obey the sovereign is the essence of Hobbesian justice.

The contract is the basis of all Hobbes' moral and political philosophy. Once a man has entered into such a contract, he is bound by it. The act of entering into it is voluntary. No man is forced to enter into such a contract. But after entering into it man is under obligation to abide by it.

In order to ensure that men fulfill this promise the sovereign makes some laws. These laws are made in the interest of the community for which these laws are meant. Hobbes holds:

Civil law, is to every subject, those rules, which the commonwealth has commanded him by word, writing or other sufficient sign of will, to make

use of, for the distinction of right, and wrong; that is to say, of what is contrary, and what is not contrary, to the law.<sup>24</sup>

The law of nature and the civil law contain each other and are of equal extent. Moral virtues such as justice, equity, mercy etc. in the condition of mere nature are not laws but qualities that lead man to peace and obedience. They become laws when the sovereign is established. Men are obliged to obey these laws when there is someone to enforce them, otherwise, these laws are the dictates of nature.

It might be objected that if the sovereign is the creator of laws then he can make a law of whatever he wills. For example, for him stealing can be a virtue. But can it be possible in Hobbes' system? Hobbes accepts that laws are made by the sovereign but he does not mean that the sovereign arbitrarily makes these laws. These laws are facts of human nature, as for example, justice, equity and other moral virtues are given in laws of nature but there they are not obligatory. The sovereign makes these laws obligatory, for the good of the subjects.

In the civil state man has to restrict his egoistic passion. He can no more act on his own. He has to obey the laws. Hobbes as a psychological egoist claims that self-

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24. Ibid., p.251.

preservation is the primary or sole principle of human life. But he also believes that in a commonwealth one should act according to the laws of commonwealth which ensure preservation and peace for all. And to say this is to adhere to an ideal which is one of justice, mercy, fellow-feeling and general happiness in which all members of the community participate and the consequences of which all persons equitably share.

Thus, people are led to the concept of general happiness and utility not because of sympathy towards their fellow citizen, but because of their self-interest. When the desire of a person to increase his own good conflicts with the desire of other person, this leads to war. And the fear of war and death lead people to think of other's interests also and they adopt some rules which are in everyone's interest. They know that if they adopt some rules, their individual good will be protected. Since individual good is not always at variance with social good, but rather in many cases works through it, in the civil state men's actions are directed towards common benefit. Now man's actions are judged not according to the consequences of the act but according to the rules which are, however, framed and imposed for the common benefit of the subjects.

It is important to note here that in the state of nature Hobbes follows psychological egoism but in the civil state Hobbesian man does not remain so egoistic and he thinks not only in terms of his own good but also in terms of public good. He thinks that his actions should always **be directed** towards getting good for himself on the ground that these actions increase the common interest. Here, Hobbes takes a turn towards utilitarianism. He accepts that in the civil state people should act in such a way that it would increase the common happiness. When he talks about the causes and the generation of the commonwealth he says that it "is a common power, to keep them (i.e. people) in awe, and to direct their actions to the common benefit."<sup>25</sup> According to him commonwealth is established for the peace and common defence. "It is the duty of princes to respect the common benefit of many not the peculiar interest of this or that man."<sup>26</sup> Civil society is instituted for the sake of the subject and therefore a particular case is not required of this or that man. Laws are universal. They are for the common benefit of the people. These laws prescribe people to act in such a way that it produces common benefit.

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25. Ibid., p.157.

26. Philosophical Rudiments..., EW, Vol. II, p.167.

But what kind of utilitarianism does he accept — act-utilitarianism or rule-utilitarianism? In order to see this we must distinguish between these two kinds of utilitarian theories.

Act-utilitarianism holds that an action is right or wrong according to its consequences i.e. general rules like 'to keep promise' 'don't tell a lie', are mere rules of thumb. The rightness or wrongness of a particular action, e.g. of keeping a promise depends only on the goodness or badness of the consequences of keeping or breaking the promise. Rule-utilitarianism, on the other hand, holds that an action is right or wrong, if and only if it follows or breaks some rule and that the correctness of the rule is a function of the consequences that follow from these rules being accepted, followed or adopted. Actions are to be tested by rules and rules by consequences.<sup>27</sup>

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27. The terms 'act-utilitarianism' and 'rule-utilitarianism' are introduced by Richard B. Brandt in his book Ethical theory (Prentice Hall, 1959). In his later discussion about utilitarianism in his article 'Toward a Credible Form of Utilitarianism', (in Morality and the Language of Conduct, eds., Nakhnikian & Castaneda, Detroit Wayne State University Press, 1965) he accepts rule-utilitarianism and says: "An action is right if and only if it conforms with that learnable set of rules the recognition of which as morally binding — roughly at the time of act- by everyone in the society of the agent, except for the retention by individuals of already formed and decided moral convictions, would maximize intrinsic value."

Hobbes in the civil state follows rule-utilitarianism. For him when the sovereign is established, the actions are judged according to rules. Hobbes' laws of nature or rules are not descriptive statements but they are prescriptive. They are not truths that can be derived logically from statements which describe men and their passions, but are rules which, if they are generally observed, do conduce to the conservation of men observing them. They are the statements of the ideal conditions required for man's existence in the civil state. Hence, he calls them moral laws. Hobbes argues:

Ignorance of the law of nature excuses no man, because every man that has attained to the use of reason, is supposed to know, he ought not to do to another, what he would not have done to himself. Therefore, into what place soever a man shall come if he do anything contrary to that law it is a crime.<sup>28</sup>

These rules are prior to the facts or actions i.e. they are not the past judgements of some actions but commonwealth first makes some laws and then judges the actions according to them.

Rules are not summaries of past decisions. They are prior to decisions and are established on the ground of what

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28. Lev., EW , Vol. III, p.279.

is needful and perspicuous for man. For Hobbes a law that is not needful is not good. A law is good when it is for the benefit of the people. There are two kinds of laws - natural and positive. Natural laws are eternal and immutable. Hobbes, however, glosses over the common distinction between natural and moral laws and accepts 'laws of nature' - in an extended sense whereby he also assimilates some laws of nature into moral laws which consist in moral virtues such as justice, equity etc. Positive laws are not eternal as they are made by the sovereign. These laws are legal sanctions and are based on the natural laws. The sovereign decides what is just, right or other forms of virtuous acts for a society according to the natural laws. Natural laws, in the context of commonwealth, express what are called the moral virtues according to which a man should act.

Positive laws are classified into human and divine laws. Again, among human positive laws some are distributive and some penal. Distributive laws determine the rights of the subjects. Penal laws are those which determine what penalty should be given to those who violate some other laws. The concept of punishment comes into existence when people lay down their natural rights and accept some laws. If these laws are violated then the person should be punished. Hobbes says:

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A punishment, is an evil inflicted by public authority on him that hath done, or omitted that which is judged by the same authority to be a transgression of the law; to the end that the will of men may thereby the better be disposed to obedience.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of punishment in Hobbes is also based on the utilitarian principle. The utilitarian theory of punishment is forward - looking. According to it punishment is justified in three ways:

- (a) It may prevent the offender from repeating that action;
- (b) It may deter other people from committing similar actions, and
- (c) it may protect other people from such an offender, by keeping him away from the rest of the society. Hobbes says that in punishment 'men look not at the greatness of the evil past, but at the greatness of the good to follow.'<sup>30</sup>

Hobbes rejects the retributive theory of punishment. The retributivist concept of punishment is that punishment should be given because the offender has committed such a crime which calls for punishment by way of retribution or retaliation. Besides, the vindication of the authority of

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29. Ibid., p.297.

30. Ibid., p.140.



law (which has been nullified through violation) and punishment being deserved or earned by the wrongful acts are also the well-known grounds on which the retributivists have staked their claim. A retributivist does not believe in the consequences that the punishment will have, whereas the utilitarian holds that punishment should be given because it invariably leads to better consequences. Punishment is given to prevent the offender as well as other people from committing that crime again and to improve them. Punishments are not revenges as Hobbes argues: "Private revenge or injuries of private men are not punishment."<sup>31</sup> Punishments proceed only from the public authority. "...the evil inflicted by usurped power, and judges without authority from the sovereign, is not punishment; but an act of hostility..."<sup>32</sup>

Punishment can be given only by public authority and 'if the harm inflicted by punishment is less than the benefit a person gets by transgressing a law, then that is not the nature of punishment'. The nature of punishment is to have for end the disposing of men to obey the law. The purpose of punishment is the correction of the offender and prevention of the other people from committing the crime.

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31. Ibid., p.298.

32. Ibid., p.298.

Hobbes' theory of punishment was later accepted by Bentham and other utilitarians. Bentham says:

All punishment is a mischief.... If it ought at all to be admitted, it ought only to be admitted in as far as it promises to exclude some greater evil...<sup>33</sup>

He further observes:

The value of the punishment must not be less in any case than what is sufficient to outweigh that of the profit of the offence.<sup>34</sup>

Most such important utilitarian arguments in favour of punishment are either used or anticipated by Hobbes. Hobbes, however, does not go all the way to accept a view which some may believe to be the reductio ad absurdum of the utilitarian view of punishment. He rejects the view that an innocent man should be punished if by punishing him greater good would result. Hobbes says that an innocent man should not be punished for an action which he has not done. He says:

All punishment of innocent subjects, be they great or little; **are against the law of nature**; for punishment is only for the transgression of the law, and therefore there can be no punishment of the innocent.<sup>35</sup>

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33. Bentham - The Principles of Morals & Legislation, Hafner publishing Co. N.Y., 1948, p.170.

34. Ibid., p.179.

35. Lev., EW, Vol. III, p.304.

According to him the punishment of an innocent is a violation of a law of nature and commonwealth won't get any good by punishing the innocent. Hobbes opposes the punishment of innocent because his theory forbids ingratitude. The sovereign gets his power from his subjects and he uses it to protect their interest as long as they are obedient. The punishment of the innocent is rendering of evil for good. Further, in punishing an innocent an equal distribution of justice is not observed. Punishment of an innocent who is not the subject of the commonwealth is allowed if it is in the benefit of the commonwealth. To punish a person who violates a law is good because it prevents other people as well as the offender from committing the same crime. For Hobbes, people should know all laws. If they don't, and they act against law, then it is a crime.

Some crimes can be excused or the punishment involved may be reduced. A crime is excused if the man has no means to inform himself that a particular law is obligatory. But those persons are not excused who pretend to be ignorant. When a man is forced to commit a crime he is excused if the terror involved is a source of any injury to his life because 'no law can oblige a man to abandon his own preservation'. An act is excused if it is done for the necessities of life. For example, if a person who does not have anything to

eat and who is dying of hunger steals something to eat, he is excused because he committed that crime to preserve his life.

In general, however, all the criminals who break the law are to be punished and this is done to preserve social good by preventing people from committing similar crimes.

Hobbes says:

The intention of the law is not to grieve the delinquent, for that which is past, **and** not to be undone; but to make him and others just, that **else** would not be so, and to respect not the evil act past, but the good to come.<sup>36</sup>

Thus it can be concluded that in the state of nature Hobbes accepts psychological egoism but in the civil state without any inconsistency he holds rule utilitarianism. He accepts that in the civil state man is less egoistic and he acts according to the laws made by the sovereign and not according to his appetites and aversions.

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36. Elements of Law, EW, Vol. IV, p.253.

### CHAPTER III

#### HOBBS ON MORAL CONCEPTS : ANALYSIS OF HIS VIEWS ON GOOD, RIGHT AND WRONG, OBLIGATION AND JUSTICE

Hobbes in his moral philosophy uses certain moral concepts which are most important for his moral theory. Here we shall analyse and see how Hobbes reaches certain moral conclusions using these concepts. These concepts are: Good, Right and Wrong, Obligation and Justice.

##### Good:

For Hobbes, since there is no morality in the state of nature, the concepts like good and bad are used in the state of nature according to the appetites and aversions of men. As Hobbes says:

Whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calls good; and the object of his hate and aversion, evil... these words of good, evil, and contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that uses them; there being nothing simply and absolutely so, nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man.<sup>1</sup>

Thus private appetite is the measure of good and evil in the state of nature. Things are not good in themselves but they are called good according to different tastes and

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1. Lev., EW, Vol. III, p.41.

opinions of persons. What one calls good may not be good for others. If a person calls a thing good, it is not necessary that another person will also call it good. People are subjective in their judgements about good and bad. Such is the condition of man in the state of nature that if two persons disagree on the question whether to call a thing good or not, there is no objective criterion to settle the dispute and if at all the two must come to an agreement, it is the person who is weak that will have to surrender.

According to Hobbes man by nature always acts for his own good and avoids evil. And what is good for him is, what is conducive to attain his end or what is conducive to his preservation. Hobbes observes:

We do not ... by nature seek society for its own sake, but that we may receive some honour or profit from it... <sup>2</sup>

Hobbes considers that there are three kinds of good: "Good ~~in the promise~~, good ~~in~~ effect, as the end desired, which is called delightful; and good as means, which is called profitable."<sup>3</sup>

Now, what are these three kinds of good? Good in promise is used in the sense of expected good or hypothetical

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2. Philosophical Rudiments..., EW, Vol. II, p.3.

3. Lev., EW, Vol. III, pp. 41-42.

good. We sometimes perform an action not because of its actual consequences, but keeping in view that what would happen if the rule which the action follows were generally practised. Such judgements are based on the possible effects of actions and events in future and are always probable in a degree commensurate with our knowledge of facts and events and our understanding of causal relations. That is, if a person performs an action, he does so because from its performance he expects certain consequences to follow which are good.

Good in effect, as the end desired which is called delightful, is used in the sense of actual good. Some actions are sometimes performed because by our past experience and events we know what consequences would follow. In this sense, if we take the hedonistic view, we can say that an action is right if its ultimate aim is to gain pleasure whether one's own or of the whole mankind. Thus, in this sense the term 'good' can be used for all those things taken as an end.

Here good is not used in the sense of supreme good as for Hobbes, there is nothing like supreme good. He says:

... the felicity of this life, consists not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no utmost aim, nor greatest good... Nor can a man

any more live, whose desires are at an end, than he, whose senses and imaginations are at a stand.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, good, in his second sense, can be an end but not the ultimate aim. But this end is also the means to some other end and in this way the process goes on and there is always a continual chain.

The last sense of good is used for good as means i.e. things are good because they are means, or are useful, to some other ends, which may be either good in promise or good in effect.

Similarly, for Hobbes, there are three kinds of evil: evil in promise, evil in effect which is unpleasant and troublesome and evil in the means - unprofitable, hurtful.

When man, from the state of nature, comes to the civil state, his private appetite does not remain the measure of good and evil. Now the sovereign decides what is good and evil according to the civil laws. What is good for a person is not what he desires, but what is worthy of desire. For example, people know that peace is desirable for them as it is good for their survival. The general observance of certain rules is or would be to their advantage, and,

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4. Ibid., p.85.



therefore, they desire their observance. In the state of nature people desire what is good for them according to their own appetite but in the civil state civil laws direct them as to what is worthy of desire. These laws are in the interest of every member of the commonwealth. For Hobbes, the civil laws are the objective statement of what is the common good that is achievable through co-operative endeavour in corporate social life. They are not only commanded by the authoritarian sovereign but are also publicly approved. Hobbes, therefore, says:

... the law is the public conscience, by which he (subject) has already undertaken to be guided. Otherwise in such diversity, as there is of private consciences, which are but private opinions, the commonwealth must needs be distracted...<sup>5</sup>

Thus in the civil state, the good is taken in the sense of public good i.e. individual good is harmonised with or delimited by public good or public good constitutes individual good. The most primitive form of social life also teaches us the simple truth that in order to achieve one's own good a person has also to take good of others into consideration. Rules of action are made on the ground that if a person wants to achieve his own good he ought to

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5. Ibid., p.311.

act in such a way that his actions are also helpful in achieving others' good. But Hobbes, in the above statement holds much more than this. He in fact appears to suggest that there can not be a purely personal or individual morality and, hence, no individual moral law. Morality demands a general and universal point of view. As he says, 'private consciences' will necessarily 'distract' the commonwealth. In other words, individual or personal concept of good or duty (i.e. law) will make the social and the civil state of man, which is the raison d'etre of morality, highly unsettled and anarchic.

For Hobbes public or social good is superior to the individual good. There is no good of society apart from the good of its members. Though good becomes objective, yet it remains personal i.e., every person enjoys his own good. But that good is not only his own good. It is also helpful for attaining others' good in some way or the other. For example, if a soldier for his satisfaction sacrifices his life he achieves his own good but that good is helpful for other members of his country i.e. he has made some contribution in saving his country by sacrificing his life. Good is objective in the sense that within the context of a society, good of one individual is generally not different from that of another — all of them being members of the same society.

In other words, society is an association of individuals, bound with some common mode of life. It is an organic whole with individuals as its parts. Good of all individuals is derived from a common measure, and their common measure is the command of the sovereign. Hobbes says "... measure of good and evil actions, is the civil law; and the judge the legislator, who is always representative of the commonwealth."<sup>6</sup>

Let us now examine whether those actions which are called good and evil are also called right and wrong. In order to do this, we will discuss the concepts of 'right' and 'wrong'.

#### Right and Wrong:

Consistent with his denial of any objective and public criterion of good and evil in the state of nature, Hobbes also holds that the terms 'right' and 'wrong' have no legitimate use in the state of nature. The very meaning of these terms presupposes the existence of rules conformity with, or transgression of, which makes an action right or wrong. He has of course admitted the possibility of private or subjective notions of good and evil in the state of nature. But for Hobbes, in the state of nature the concepts of right

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6. Ibid., p.311.

and wrong have no place because there is no authority to judge what is right and what is wrong. Every man is the judge of his own actions. Hobbes argues:

The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law where no law, no injustice...<sup>7</sup>

In the state of nature man acts for his own good and therefore, no action can be wrong because what he decides for his own good is not wrong for him. What is right or wrong is determined by the sovereign. What the civil law commands is right and what it forbids is wrong. In Hobbes' words, "... the distinction of right, and wrong, is drawn from what is contrary, and what is not contrary to the rule."<sup>8</sup> When a commonwealth is established and rules are made, actions are judged according to these rules and these rules are based on certain virtues. The observance of these virtues without a common power is impossible, because, to observe them in the condition of mere nature "... is contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality, pride, revenge, and the like."<sup>9</sup>

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7. Ibid., p.115.

8. Ibid., p.251.

9. Ibid., pp.153-154.

The objective source of what is right and wrong is the sovereign. The rightness or wrongness of an action is decided according to the rules; and the correctness of the rule is the function of the consequences that follow from that rule i.e. an action is right if it produces more good than any other alternative action. A subject ought to choose that action which results in better consequences. For example if **while** performing an action a person does not follow the rule but takes the consequences of that act as the reason to perform that action, it can be said that he performs an action not because he is following a rule but because of its consequences. And may be, if he follows the rule he will get lesser good than if he decides not to follow the rule. Thus, he may decide not to follow the rule. But Hobbes may say here that the utility of action is not judged according to some particular cases. Action should be according to the rule and the correctness of the rule is a function of the consequences of its being followed. Rules are judged according to the utility they have. One ought to perform those actions which follow rules and a rule is justifiable if its being followed by every one would bring about the greatest amount of good to the members of the community. What is right for a person is right for all, and in a commonwealth a person has to give up his private feelings

and he is obligated to act in accordance with the law. These laws are good for the people as also perspicuous. The use of the laws which are rules authorized "... is not to bind the people from all voluntary actions; but to direct and keep them in such a motion, as not to hurt themselves by their own impetuous desires, rashness... as hedges are set, not to stop traveller, but to keep them in their way."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, laws direct people as to what they ought and what they ought not to do. They decide what obligations they have or do not have in the civil state.

#### Obligation:

Hobbes believes in two kinds of obligations: inforo interno and inforo externo. In the state of nature there are rights and duties which hold inforo interno. An inforo interno obligation is merely an obligation to desire that certain act be done, not obligations to do those actions, as Hobbes says: "... that they bind to a desire they should take place."<sup>11</sup>

Inforo externo obligation is an external obligation. These obligations arise only when there is someone to enforce

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10. Ibid., p.335.

11. Ibid., p.145.

them. People are obligated to perform some action only when they have covenanted to perform it. Though covenants can be made in the state of nature, it is not sure whether they be fulfilled. For example, if two parties make a covenant and one of them does not fulfill the promise, then the other party, if it is not strong enough, cannot force the **first** party to perform the requisite action in the absence of the sovereign power which can enforce it. In the condition of nature, since man has got full freedom to do whatever he wants to do, (provided, of course, if he can do so) he does not have any obligation. As Hobbes says: "Obligation and liberty... in one and the same matter are inconsistent."<sup>12</sup>

What it means is that morality leads one to certain obligations which take away from man his freedom to do whatever he likes to do. 'One ought to do x' means one ought not to do anything contrary to x. Obligation curtails human freedom. To be bound is evidently not to be free.

On the other hand, every man has a right to do everything in the state of nature, which means there are no obligations.

Warrender in his book - 'The Political Philosophy of Hobbes' argues in a different manner. For him, according to

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12. Ibid., p.117.

Hobbes there are obligations in the state of nature. He writes:

Hobbes's theory of obligation begins with his account of man in the State of Nature that is of man outside or apart from State. Even here, on Hobbes's view, the individual is bound by some obligations though these obligations are always dependent upon the satisfaction of certain validating conditions.<sup>13</sup>

Warrender points out that in order to justify the view that there are obligations in the state of nature, we should see the following passage from Leviathan:

Covenants entered into by fear, in the condition of mere nature are obligatory, for example, if I covenant to pay a ransom, or service for my life, to an enemy; I am bound by it: for it is a contract, wherein one receives the benefit of life; the other is to receive money, or service for it, and consequently where no other law, as in the condition of mere nature, forbids the performance, the covenant is valid.... For whatsoever I may lawfully do without obligation, the same I may lawfully covenant to do through fear: and what I lawfully covenant, I can not lawfully break.<sup>14</sup>

But Hobbes suggests:

And when a man has ... abandoned, or granted away his right; then is he said to be obliged, or bound, not to hinder those, to whom such right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it; and that he ought and it is his duty, not to make void that voluntary act of his own.<sup>15</sup>

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13. Warrender, H. : The Political Philosophy of Hobbes, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), Ch. III, p.30.
  14. EW, Vol. III, pp. 126-27.
  15. Ibid., p.119.



This passage brings out clearly the determination or curtailment of human freedom which the concept of obligation implies.

Man abandons his right only after establishing a commonwealth. Warrender here has misunderstood Hobbes when he says that people have obligations in the state of nature also. Hobbes has said that in the state of nature these laws of nature oblige inforo interno i.e. people are bound by a desire that the law of nature 'should take place'. But, since people are not sure that if they follow the laws the other person will also do the same, they do not consider it their duty to follow these laws. When a man knows that it is not in his advantage to follow the laws when others are not following them, he does not consider himself bound by the obligation to follow the rules. And he is free to do whatever he wants to do. Thus, when Warrender says that there are obligations in the state of nature, he is making a mistake. People can make covenants in the state of nature but they are not valid, due to the lack of common power.

The second kind of obligation, i.e., inforo externo arises, as we have said earlier, when the sovereign is instituted. This kind of obligation is conditional and self-imposed i.e. people restrict their natural right and make covenants. Covenants are thus the ground of obligations.

People make covenants or they lay down their right on the ground that peace and common defence will be established. No action is obligatory if the conditions such as peace and security are not assured. When these conditions are prevalent, people are obligated to act according to the commands of the sovereign because they have transferred their natural right to the sovereign. In such a condition people ought to act according to the laws. These laws are the commands of the sovereign. They are moral laws; they are established on moral virtues such as justice, equity, mercy, etc., and people are morally obliged to follow them. These moral laws do not describe hypothetical facts as they do in the state of nature, when these laws are in the form of laws of nature. In the state of nature these laws are as descriptive as laws of natural science. They state facts about human nature. As in natural science other laws are always compatible with some fundamental laws, likewise these laws of nature work as fundamental for other laws of human nature. Hobbes observes:

... the laws of nature, which consist in justice, equity, gratitude, and other moral virtues... in the condition of mere nature are not properly laws, but qualities that dispose men to peace and obedience. When a commonwealth is once settled, then are they actually laws, and not before.<sup>16</sup>

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16. Ibid., p.253.

What Hobbes seems to imply is that in the state of nature all other laws of nature are subordinated under one supreme law of self-preservation. Since man is naturally egoist, there is no other principle of hierarchy of laws except the super-ordination of self-preservation.

The laws are made moral laws when the sovereign becomes moral authority. For Hobbes, "What the legislator commands is good and what he forbids is evil."<sup>17</sup>

Hobbes is not suggesting here that whatever the legislator commands is equal to good and what he forbids is necessarily bad. What he means to say is that by good and evil we mean what is, and what is not, against the laws. Legislator commands according to the civil laws and these laws determine what is good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest.

Hobbes indeed appears to have confused between the legal and the moral senses of obligation. An obligation in the legal sense is grounded in the authority of the law, given by, and in the subsequent acceptance of, such an authority. In fact, legal obligation consists merely in doing as the law requires us to do simply because the law

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17. Philosophical Rudiments..., EW, Vol. II, p.150.

enjoins upon us such a duty. The authority sanctioning such a duty is vested with the political institution which is external to the individual. Moral obligation, on the other hand, emanates from one's own free choice and acceptance of moral principles. The authority in this context is primarily internal, though, in order to be objective and universally acceptable, it has to transcend the confines of subjectivity and ego-centricity and must conform to a number of demands and claims which are externally applicable. Hobbes, as we have seen, did recognise the distinction between obligations inforo interno and inforo externo, but distorts its relevance by identifying the former with the 'brutish and nasty' state of nature and the latter with the civil state which alone makes morality possible. Hobbes' intention is to make the sovereign the fountainhead of both political and moral authority and therefore, he holds that people derive their obligations from the sovereign's command and also from covenants they make. To obey the sovereign's commands is also a moral obligation for him. An obligation does not become a moral obligation unless the sovereign commands its observance.

#### Justice:

In the state of nature nothing is just or unjust. Where there is no law there cannot be justice or injustice.

Hobbes says:

Justice, and injustice are none of the faculties neither of the body, nor mind. If they were, they might be in a man that were alone in the world... They are qualities, that relate to men in society, not in solitude.<sup>18</sup>

But when the covenants are made then non-performance of covenants is injustice and whatsoever is not unjust is just. An action is just if it is the performance of the covenant.

Hobbes makes a distinction between just actions and just men.

When (just and unjust) they are attributed to men, they signify conformity, or inconformity of manners, to reason. But when they are attributed to actions, they signify the conformity or inconformity to reason, ... of particular actions.<sup>19</sup>

An unjust man can perform a just act and a just man can perform an unjust act.

Hobbes says that justice of actions is divided into two kinds - commutative and distributive.

Commutative is placed in the equality of value of the things contracted for; and distributive in the distribution

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18. EW, Vol. III, p.115.

19. Ibid., p.135.

of equal benefit to men of equal merit. Commutative justice is the justice of a contractor and distributive justice, the justice of an arbitrator, i.e. the act of defining what is just. And, if those persons who make him arbitrator, trust him and if the arbitrator performs his trust, he is said to distribute to every man his due and this is called equity, the equal distribution.

For the equal distribution and performance of the covenants we need a common power or the sovereign to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants. As "... covenants without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."<sup>20</sup>

These covenants are not made due to some altruistic will, or as Hume said, because man has fellow-feeling or sympathy for others i.e. in consideration of others' good and evil as if it were one's own. Hume said that ~~this~~ quality leads man to virtues of humanness, integrity and justice. For Hobbes, on the other hand, justice is established not because of fellow-feeling but because people want to preserve their own good in persuance of which they have to keep the covenants. And to observe whether the covenants are kept or not, we need a common power.

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20. Ibid., p.154.

Although to establish justice a common power is needed but Hobbes does not define justice as Thrasymachus defines it, i.e. that justice is nothing but the interest of the stronger. For Hobbes, though the sovereign is stronger but the interest of the sovereign is not separate from that of his subject. It is the sovereign's duty to keep peace and protect his subjects against a common enemy.

Hobbes, unlike Hume, does not believe that justice can exist without a law. For Hume, society is a sufficient condition for the establishment of justice, it is not necessary that there should be some common power for the observance of it. According to Hobbes, there can be no society without law. Hence, the question of justice or injustice without a law does not arise. Justice is conditional. If society does not impose sanctions on people then we cannot talk of justice as obligatory.

Just actions are those which are utility- producing and they are performed in such a way that they produce the greatest possible amount of happiness for ourselves as well as for others. The origin and basis of justice lies in the good of society, that is, in a good, greater than that of any individual or private good. What is just is ultimately decided only by determining what is good for society. All

laws are just or unjust according as they promote or hinder social good.

It is, thus, evident that Hobbes accepts the utilitarian concept of justice. He says that to keep covenants or to make covenants constant and lasting we require a common power "... which direct our actions to the common benefit."<sup>21</sup> When we say that an action is just, it means that it conforms to the public good and law. Indeed for Hobbes, all laws are directed towards the promotion of public good. One ought to be just in order to bring about the public good. If men ought to do justice, it is not only because they will be punished if they do not, but also because it promotes social good. Justice imposes moral duty based on social good and not merely on legal sanctions.

Hobbes analyses justice in terms of social contract i.e. from social contract he derives the principles of justice. Hobbes here anticipates Rawls. Rawls conceives of justice as a condition that must be accepted if men are to engage in a common enterprise. He suggests:

Imagine a number of rational and mutually self-interested persons situated in an initial position of equal liberty. Assume that they

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21. Lev., EW, Vol. III, p.157.



are to propose and acknowledge before one another general principles applicable to their common institution as standards by which their complaints against these institutions are to be judged.<sup>22</sup>

Rawls further develops the conception of justice in two principles:

(1)... each person participating in a practice, or affected by it, has an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all; and (2) inequalities are arbitrary unless it is reasonable to expect that they will work out for everyone's advantage, and provided the positions and offices to which they attach, or from which they may be gained, are open to all.<sup>23</sup>

This concept is the concept of equity and impartiality. Inequalities are justified only when they bring out the advantage which is good for all. For Rawls the concept of fairness is fundamental to justice. Hobbes also accepts equity as a law of nature. He writes: "If a man be trusted to judge between man and man, it is a precept of the law of nature, that he deals equally between them."<sup>24</sup> He further says that: "The things that make a good judge, or a good interpreter of the laws, are, first a right understanding of ~~the~~ principal law of nature called Equity."<sup>25</sup> It is both

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22. Rawls, J. : 'The Sense of Justice', Philosophical Review, 1963.

23. Rawls, J. : 'Justice as Fairness', Phil. Review, 1958.

24. EW, Vol. III, p.142.

25. Ibid., p.269.

morally necessary and socially expedient that they apply the law equally and impartially.

Hence, for Hobbes, to be just is to be impartial and as he argues: "... the law that commands equity; that is to say, an equal distribution of justice; which in punishing the innocent is not observed."<sup>26</sup> In this way Hobbes does not believe in punishing the innocent, whether it promotes social good or not. Punishment is meant only for the transgression of the law. The objection which is raised against the utilitarian theory, that it permits the punishment of an innocent in those cases where it increases the social good, cannot be raised against Hobbes.

Thus, Hobbes' concept of justice is based on the principle of equity and public good, and therefore, it is not egoism but utilitarianism within which his concept of justice finds its consistent application.

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26. Ibid., p. 304.

## CHAPTER IV

### HOBBS ON LANGUAGE

#### (i) Hobbes' Philosophy of Language

After having discussed Hobbes' ethical theory, we may look into Hobbes' views on the nature and function of language with a view to understand the meta-moral perspective within which many of his observations in ethics would be better understood. As we had occasion to see, there are many assertions concerning moral concepts which are consequent upon his understanding of language which ultimately enables him to develop an approach towards moral language which is as novel as it is interesting.

There are two basic functions of a language which Hobbes recognises. The first, to recall those thoughts which were **once** at the conscious level, and the second, being the purpose of communication which includes expressing our conception of matters, our own desires, fears and passions. It is not possible to have communication without some words which, metaphorically speaking, are carriers of thoughts, desires etc., though it is possible to think of a man recalling his thoughts without having a verbal language. As thoughts, desires etc. are not perceivable by other persons, we need some sign language which will help us in communicating them. Hence, the need for signs.

What can be a sign? The one basic condition any sign, natural or arbitrary, has to fulfil is that it must be perceivable by all normal human beings. Any word (spoken or written) is a sign in this sense. Any sign can perform the function of a mark as well. Marks are those, according to Hobbes, which help someone to recall his thoughts.<sup>1</sup> These marks also need to be perceivable, for only perceiving the marks, one is reminded of ~~one's~~ thoughts which are associated with those marks by habit formation. But, this explanation of mark does not seem to be very satisfactory as it is possible for someone to recall some thought by recalling another thought. One thought can become a mark of another thought, though both of them are not sensible. By definition Hobbes rules out such marks. In principle any mark, for Hobbes, can become a sign as both of them are perceivable. The only difference between a sign and a mark is, that the conventional association of a word (or sign) with some idea is publicly known. Whereas, the arbitrary association of a word (or mark) with some idea is private i.e. only known by one person and serves the purpose of recollecting his thought. A mark which I use can be made public by letting others know for ~~what~~ the mark stands. Nevertheless, I can

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1. Elements of Philosophy, Ist. Sec. Concerning Body, EW, Vol. I, p.14.

use the signs (words) to do the function of marks: to recall my thoughts which are at the subconscious level. In such a case there is some possibility of **losing** my privacy. Marks cannot be used in a communication situation for others do not know the conventional use of the mark. To sum up: all signs are marks, but no mark is a sign, though in principle all marks can be converted into signs by establishing and letting others know certain conventions regarding the use of marks.

Apart from the above two main functions, language has other functions as well. The special use of a language is to advise someone according to the knowledge we have acquired. We express our wills, purposes or intentions in a language and we also use language to please and delight ourselves as well as others by playing with words.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that Hobbes makes room for jokes, mimics, etc.

Before going into the nature of speech, it is better to consider the constituents of speech, namely, the names and grammatical parts of the speech. Hobbes classifies names into body, accident, phantasm etc. Another

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2. EW, Vol. III, p.20.

classification he does of names is: positive, negative, contradictory; still another classification is: universal, particular, individual and indefinite. Apart from these classifications, there is another classification of names which interests us most from the point of view of philosophy of language i.e. names into proper and common.<sup>3</sup> In modern terminology, we also use the same term for what Hobbes calls proper name, and common names are called concepts. How far these classifications help any philosophical purpose is very hard to say. It is certainly important from the logical point of view to recognize certain characteristics which certain names possess, e.g. contradictory names. One might say, two contradictory names cannot be predicated (though it is odd to say that names can be predicated, in Hobbes' scheme one has to use such a language) to the same subject at the same time. As names all these names have one common function, namely, that of referring. The other feature which generally goes along with all these names is that there are certain marks or signs associated with them. However, for certain reasons which we will discuss when we discuss the speech, it is important to retain the distinction between proper and common names. The fundamental difference

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3. Ibid., p.21.

between these names is: proper names are singular and refer to one and only one e.g. "Peter", "this man," etc. whereas, common names refer to many ideas at a time e.g. "man", "horse" etc. It is interesting to note that so called logically proper names are also names for Hobbes. Common names do not refer to only one thing, though they refer to one kind of things. One clarificatory point may be relevant here. Universals are also names for Hobbes. They are common names, as a universal name is also not a proper name; it is not a name of one thing. Hobbes writes:

One universal name is imposed on many things, for their similitude in some quality, or other accident; and whereas a proper name bringeth to mind one thing only, universals recall any one of those many.<sup>4</sup>

Hobbes believes that there can be names of non-existing things. That is to say, a name is not only a name of an object which is existing in space and time. At one place Hobbes writes:

To conclude; this word nothing is a name, which yet cannot be the name of any thing: for when, for example, we subtract 2 and 3 from 5, and so nothing remaining, we would call that subtraction to mind, this speech nothing remains, and in it the word nothing is not unuseful.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Ibid., p.21.

5. EW, Vol. I, pp.17-18.

The above example of "nothing" being a name may be considered as an example of a common name, as we do not say that "nothing" is a proper name. We strongly believe that it does not go against the position of Hobbes to talk of "Pegasus", a mythological horse. It is quite evident that Hobbes is not a nominalist in the sense Meinong is, for it is meaningless to talk of Pegasus if Pegasus does not exist or subsist for Meinong.

Hobbes cautions us against certain apparent names, for example, "incorporeal body" or "round quadrangle". These are not names, though they may appear to be, for they are insignificant sounds<sup>6</sup> having no reference. To answer the question: "Though 'incorporeal' and 'body' are names, why is the term 'incorporeal body' not a name?", one has to go much deeper into the logic of names which includes the extensions of these names. Nevertheless, any word which is not associated with an idea is yet an insignificant (apparent) name.

It is not non-sense to talk of names of names and names of speech in Hobbesian terms. He writes:

... we bring into account, consider, and give names, to names themselves, and to speeches: for

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6. EW, Vol. I, p.27.



general, universal, special, equivocal, are names of names. And affirmation, interrogation, commandment, narration, syllogism, sermon, oration, and many other such, are names of speeches.<sup>7</sup>

Names of names are possible because some names belonging to one kind can be named further. For example, the name "universal" is **a name** of the following names: all trees, all men, some trees, some men etc. while talking about the names of the first and second intention, Hobbes makes the same point:

But it is hard to say why those are called names of the first, and these of the second intention, unless perhaps it was first intended by us to give names to those things which are of daily use in this life, and afterwards to such things as appertain to science, that is, that our second intention was to give names to names.<sup>8</sup>

It must be noted that Hobbes does not hold the denotative relation between the name and a conception in the mind. A materialist as he is, he does not admit universals or real essences in the world. Universals exist only in language. As Watkins has suggested, a universal name is 'a pluralized version'<sup>9</sup> of a proper name. The names of things are the names of 'first intention' whereas universals

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7. EW, Vol., III, p.26.

8. EW, Vol. I, p.21.

9. Watkins, J.W.N. : Hobbes's System of Ideas, London: Hutchinson University Library, 1965, p.143.

are names of the 'second intention', i.e., names of names.

It is however, a mistake to think that only one word must be used to stand for a name. Not only that, the words in use can also be used to form a phrase which stands for a name other than the ones they stand for when used independently. Hobbes makes it clear when he writes:

For all these words, he that in his actions observeth the laws of his country, make but one name, equivalent to this one word, just.<sup>10</sup>

While distinguishing simple and compound names Hobbes makes the same point:

But here it is to be noted, that a name is not taken in philosophy, as in grammar, for one single word, but for any number of words put together to signify one thing; for among philosophers sentient animated body passes but for one name, being the name of every living creature, which yet among grammarians, is accounted three names.<sup>11</sup>

Obviously enough, in Hobbes' scheme of names, one can talk of synonymous names. "Just" is synonymous with "he that in his actions observeth the laws of his country". Wherever we use the word "just" in sentences, we can use this phrase instead, without bringing any change in the meaning and truth value of the sentence.

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10. EW, Vol. III, p.21.

11. EW, Vol. I, p.23.

Hobbes also recognises ambiguous names. A word is ambiguous when it has more than one senses. While writing about univocal and equivocal names, Hobbes clarifies the point that equivocal names are ambiguous names. He writes:

Univocal are those which in the same train of discourse signify always the same thing; but equivocal those which mean sometimes one thing and sometimes another. Thus... parabola to be equivocal, for the signification it has sometimes of allegory or similitude, and sometimes of a certain geometrical figure. Also every metaphor is by profession equivocal.<sup>12</sup>

Hobbes is well aware of the problems that an imprecise name creates. He recognises two kinds of imprecise names, one being imprecise quantified names, the other being too general names. He writes:

Of indefinite signification is, first, that name which has the word some, or the like added to it, and is called a particular name; secondly, a common name set by itself without any note either of universality or particularity, as man, stone, and is called an indefinite name; but both particular and indefinite names are of uncertain signification, because the hearer knows not what thing it is the speaker would have him conceive; and therefore in speech, particular and indefinite names are to be esteemed equivalent to one another.<sup>13</sup>

So far we have discussed about names taking it for granted that a name is a name of an idea. This needs be

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12. Ibid., pp.22-23.

13. Ibid., pp.21-22.

stressed as many philosophers take names to be names of some things or objects. We are generally inclined to think that the name "Socrates" stands for the human being Socrates. It is philosophically important to note that for Hobbes "Socrates" does not stand for the human being Socrates, but for the idea of Socrates. Similarly for Hobbes, "man" does not stand for any particular man or beings which are men, but for the concept or idea of man. There are three things that ought to be distinguished: A word or a sign which stands for an idea; an idea which is different from the things or objects and the things with which ideas are related.<sup>14</sup> The word or sign "Socrates" must be differentiated from the idea of Socrates. The sign "Socrates" so far as it is not conventionally associated with the idea of Socrates is an insignificant word. Once the word is associated with the idea of Socrates, it becomes significant. Thus, a name is constituted of two things: an idea, and a sign which is associated with the idea. Somehow an idea

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14. We may point out here that when Leibniz refers to Hobbes as a "super-nominalist" (Philosophical Papers and Letters, Tr. and Ed. by L.E. Loemter, p.199) he is misunderstanding Hobbes because he is ascribing to him the view that "the truth of thing itself consists in names" whereas Hobbes clearly makes the distinction between ideas and things and is only suggesting a semantic concept of truth when he says: "Truth consists in speech, and not in the things spoken of; and though true be sometimes opposed to apparent or feigned,..." (EW, Vol.I, p.35).

is related to the corresponding thing. The idea of Socrates is related in some way to the human being called Socrates. To have a name it is not necessary to have some relationship between an idea and a thing, for in that case Hobbes cannot talk of "Pegasus" being a name. This makes Hobbes' position better than that of Meinong, though in some sense Hobbes also is a nominalist. The following passage makes it quite clear that a name is not a name of a thing. Hobbes writes:

But seeing names ordered in speech (as is defined) are signs of our conceptions, it is manifest they are not signs of the things themselves; for that the sound of this word stone should be the sign of a stone, cannot be understood in any sense but this, that he that hears it collects that he that pronounces it thinks of a stone.<sup>15</sup>

As a short-hand expression Hobbes talks of names of things which is evident in the following passage:

But seeing every name has some relation to that which is named, though that which we name be not always a thing that has a being in nature, yet it is lawful for doctrine's sake to apply the word thing to whatsoever we name: as if it were all one whether that thing be truly existent, or be only feigned.<sup>16</sup>

It is unfortunate that Hobbes does not make the notion of word-meaning very clear, though one can reasonably

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15. EW, Vol. I, p.17.

16. Ibid., p.18.

hold that the meaning of a word is an idea for which it stands. The following are the reasons one may give to support this thesis: (1) A mere sound or a sign is meaningless (or insignificant) unless it is associated with an idea. (2) Hobbes clearly denies that the things are the meanings of words as these do not stand for things and further, some names are significant even if there is no such thing e.g. "nothing". (3) Hobbes does not deny any meaning to a word, but primarily he talks only of meaning of sentences as he believes that a speech is constituted of significant words. The meaning of a word for Hobbes seems to constitute what we call cognitive, emotive and suggestive meanings of a word. This point we will discuss again when we come to his views concerning moral language.

Here it is desirable to make some distinction between an image and an idea. It is likely that in some places where Hobbes uses the word "idea" it appears that he uses it in the sense of an image; whereas there is sufficient reason to believe that he distinguishes an image from an idea. Hobbes quite often says that when the hearer hears the word the associated idea comes to his mind. One is tempted to think that Hobbes is using idea in the sense of an image, because 'coming to one's mind' suggests that it is an image. One such misleading passage is the following:

If therefore a man see something afar off and obscurely, although no appellation had yet been given to anything, he will, notwithstanding, have the same idea of that thing for which now, by imposing a name on it, we call it body. Again, when, by coming nearer, he sees the same thing thus and thus, now in one place and now in another, he will have a new idea thereof, namely, that for which we now call such a thing animated.<sup>17</sup>

A possible interpretation one can give of this passage is that Hobbes is talking about images. As the person comes nearer, the perception of that man becomes more clear and the image of him also becomes more clear. Earlier the seer had only an image of a body, later on he formed an image of an animated body. Another interpretation which seems to be nearer the truth is that as in the beginning the seer could not perceive the body properly, he could only know that it is a body; in other words, he could only identify the thing to be a body, and when the body came nearer, he could recognise the other property of the body i.e. it is also animated. In fact the word "new idea" should not be taken in the sense that the old idea is replaced by a new idea. It should be understood that some more facts about the thing are known as it came nearer because of which perception became sharper. In fact, though he had the idea a

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17. Ibid., p.4.

second time that it is animated, this second idea did not replace his earlier idea that it is a body. It is now both body as well as animated. One can support this second view by admitting that Hobbes is reasonably consistent and by producing a reductio ad absurdum argument. That, if Hobbes means by an idea an image, then he cannot talk of an idea of nothing nor can he consider "future" to be a significant name, but in fact he positively talks about them.

Hobbes, like Wittgenstein, has warned against linguistic confusions and possible philosophical problems that arise from them. He believes that a philosopher must know the proper use of words. He brings to our notice such possible errors off and on. At one place he talks of "abuses of speech"<sup>18</sup> where he precisely talks of four ways of wrong uses. At some other place he writes:

... a man that seeketh precise truth had need to remember what every name he uses stands for, and to place it accordingly, or else he will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime twigs, the more he struggles the more belimed.<sup>19</sup>

And still somewhere else he writes:

And, therefore, that disputation, whether names signify the matter or form, or something

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18. EW, Vol. III, p.20.

19. Ibid., p.23.



compounded of both, and other like subtleties of the metaphysics, is kept up by erring men, and such as understand not the words they dispute about.<sup>20</sup>

A speech must possess a thought. A thoughtless sentence cannot be a speech. A speech has names as constituents. Apart from this, a speech is not merely any combination of words, for any combination of words may not possess a thought. A speech in order to possess a thought requires two conditions: (1) it must be grammatically correct and (2) it must be semantically permissible. Unfortunately, Hobbes does not devote any space in his writings for grammar. He takes it for granted. One can gather some ideas on grammar from some of his statements not directly on grammar but on something else. Traditional grammar which talks of subjects and predicates and verbs is also found in a speech. The function of grammar is to show the kind of connection between two or more names in a speech. He writes while talking about proposition:

Now the former name is commonly called the subject, or antecedent, or the contained name, and the latter the predicate, consequent, or containing name. The sign of connection amongst most nations is either some word, as the word is in the

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20. EW, Vol. I, p.17. Also see for the same point being repeated in different forms in pp. 19, 30, 33, 34 and EW, Vol. III, p.28.

proposition man is a living creature, or some case or termination of a word, as in this proposition, man walketh (which is equivalent to this, man is walking); the termination by which it is said he walketh, rather than he is walking, signifieth that those two are understood to be copulated, or to be names of the same thing.<sup>21</sup>

Hobbes also thinks that it is not always necessary that a speech must be in a strict grammatical form to possess a thought. He suggests that we can do away with verbs which traditional grammar thinks to be a must to have a meaningful sentence:

But there are, or certainly may be, some nations that have no word which answers to our verb is, who nevertheless form propositions by the position only of one name after another as if instead of man is a living creature, it should be said man a living creature; for the very order of the names may sufficiently show their connection; and they are as apt and useful in philosophy, as if they were copulated by the verb is.<sup>22</sup>

This suggestion does not seem to be very useful, for without verbs we have serious doubts whether a language can retain its creative capacity. And further, if we are to talk of the positions of names, then we can talk of only those sentences which occur in only some particular order and we

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21, EW, Vol. I, pp. 30-31.

22, Ibid., p.31.

cannot have any complex sentences. Without the verbs it is difficult to point out the tense of a sentence. Moreover, modern grammarians have shown that grammar does not limit itself to only speeches in the crude sense it was taken to be, but it has much to do with the semantic part of the words in a sentence. In this sense we cannot help but accept grammar as an unavoidable element of speech. There are certain combinations of words which are not semantically permissible. Hobbes writes:

For whenever any affirmation is false, the two names of which it is composed, put together and made one, signify nothing at all. For example, if it be a false affirmation to say a quadrangle is round, the word round quadrangle signifies nothing, but is a mere sound.<sup>23</sup>

"Round quadrangle" is an insignificant name because this combination of words is not semantically permissible.

One of the primary functions of language is communication. Communication also includes teaching a word to others who do not know it. This can be done in two ways according to Hobbes, by giving: (1) ostensive definition, or (2) primary definition. The one who has not acquired considerable vocabulary cannot learn a word following the second method, for primary definition is always expressing

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23. EW, Vol. III, p.21.

the same idea in terms of other words. That is to say , to learn one name the person concerned has to know at least two relevant names or more. In learning a name through ostensive definition the prerequisite is that the thing named must be within the sphere of the perceptual field of both the teacher and the taught. This is not to say that a person cannot learn a name on his own by observing the things in nature. An example will explain better how a man learns a name by himself. Suppose a man observes a triangle and two right angles. By contemplation he will come to know that the sum of all the angles of the triangle is equal to two right angles. If he observes another triangle having different shape and tries to compare with those two right angles, he will discover that the sum of those three angles is equal to the two right angles. He will find the same with respect to a third triangle. When the man realises by his experiment that the sum of the angles does not differ according to the length of the sides or any other thing in his triangles, he discovers a rule: every triangle has the sum of its three angles equal to two right angles. This is a universal rule and therefore is true for all times and places.<sup>24</sup> Suppose, he associates this rule with a sign,

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24. EW, Vol. III, p.22.

say, "sum of all the angles of a triangle", then he can teach the same name to others the way he has learnt. This is what one may call ostensive way of teaching. Thus Hobbes writes:

And seeing teaching is nothing but leading the mind of him we teach, to the knowledge of our inventions, in that track by which we attained the same with our own mind; therefore, the same method that served for our invention, will serve also for demonstration to others...<sup>25</sup>

The other way of teaching the same name is to define it in the form of a rule in a proposition i.e. "Every triangle has the sum of its three angles equal to two right angles". This definition will be useful in teaching the name only when the taught knows the words used in the definition.

A definition of a name is an explication of the same name by speech. Some definitions need genus and differentia, and if any name be the most universal in its kind then the definition cannot contain genus and differentia, but the speech must bring out the idea. Even if the genus and differentia are present in a speech that does not make a definition e.g. "This is a straight line". According to Hobbes definition "is a proposition, whose predicate

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25. EW, Vol. I, p.80.

resolves the subject, when it may; and when it may not, it exemplifies the same."<sup>26</sup>

Hobbes believes that there are some names which are simple and universal. Any compounded name can be defined in terms of its simples and it will be less universal in comparison with its components. For example, "body" is a simple name and "animated body" is a compounded name.<sup>27</sup> The name "body" is more universal and "animated body" is less universal, for all animated bodies are bodies, but not all bodies are animated bodies. Hobbes emphasises the importance of the definition in the following passage:

By this it appears how necessary it is for any man that aspires to true knowledge, to examine the definitions of former authors; and either to correct them, where they are negligently set down, or to make them himself. For the errors of definitions multiply themselves according as the reckoning proceeds, and lead men into absurdities, which at last they see, but cannot avoid, without reckoning anew from the beginning, in which lies the foundation of their errors.<sup>28</sup>

There are certain categories of names. All names of bodies belong to one category. In every category, there will be simple and compound names; and compounded names can

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26. Ibid., p.83.

27. Ibid., p.24

28. EW, Vol. III, p.24.

be understood only when the simple names are understood. Therefore, in order to acquire the knowledge of compounded names, it is necessary to learn the definitions of simple names. The definitions of simple names express the primary propositions. Thus Hobbes writes:

Primary (proposition) is that wherein the subject is explicated by a predicate of many names, as man is a body, animated, rational; for that which is comprehended in the name man is more largely expressed in the names body, animated, and rational, joined together; and it is called primary, because it is first in ratiocination; for nothing can be proved, without understanding first the name of the thing in question.<sup>29</sup>

To sum up our discussion on learning a language, the following procedure has to be adopted: (1) Teach the simple names first. In teaching simple names one may adopt ostensive way or use definitions which express the primary propositions. (2) Once the person learns the simple names, then the compounded names can be defined in terms of simple names.

Language is used for communication in the form of speech. What we communicate is a thought or an idea. When we communicate an idea to others, we have to communicate through words. (In a context where a word may serve as a

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29. EW, Vol. I, pp. 36-37.

sentence, the word will be an abridged form of a sentence.) Strictly speaking, a thought cannot exist in one word. That is not to deny the possibility of word-meaning. When we learn a name, we must be able to form a thought or idea. A thought or idea is possible only when we do some identification, and differentiation. When we learn common names, in most cases, we differentiate the idea from other ideas belonging to the same genus and at the same time we recognize that it is a part of the genus name. In the case of proper names, we differentiate the idea from other names belonging to the same category and identify it as belonging to the category. In order to identify and differentiate, we need at least two ideas.<sup>30</sup> It is appropriate to say that any word or sign which stands for an idea is an abridged form of a speech. If a man learns a name from others, he learns it in the form of a speech which states the definition of

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30. Most of the time we believe that we can differentiate two things as well. For example, one can differentiate between his pen and the paper on which he is writing. For Hobbes, in this case what you are differentiating is not between the pen and the paper, but between the thoughts or ideas which those things have given rise to. Without the ideas of a pen and a paper one would not be in a position to differentiate them in the way they are done. But, in such a case one might differentiate between them, calling one white, the other red; however Hobbes would raise the objection, that how could you do that without having an idea of what it is to be white and red.



the name which expresses a primary proposition. But, if he learns in an ostensive way, though identification and differentiation are still involved, it is not very explicit, for he is not explicitly using the names, which he can do as well.

We have seen that Hobbes talks of synonymous names. He also admits the possibility of synonymous speeches.<sup>31</sup> If "unmarried" and "bachelor" are synonymous names, then the speech "Mr. X is a bachelor" is synonymous with "Mr. X is unmarried". In other words, if the definition of the name "bachelor" is "the man who has or had no spouse", then the name "unmarried" will also have the same definition or any other definition which is synonymous with it.

Meaning of a speech is determined by the component words. For example, the meaning of the speech "Man is just" is the idea which the sentence is used to express. The meaning of this speech is constituted by the meanings of names "man" and "just". "Man is just" is used to express one complex idea. The definition of man is a "rational-living-creature" and the definition of just is "he that in his actions observeth the laws of his country". These

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31. EW, Vol. I, p.39.

two definitions express two ideas and both of them combine themselves into a complex idea which the speech "Man is just" expresses. A speech which consists of only two names can be used to express one idea (unless the sentence is ambiguous), but we can very well have some compound speeches which can be used to express more than one idea in a speech. In that case, each clause will express one idea simple or complex.

It must be pointed out that Hobbes does not retain the distinction between a meaningless or an absurd speech and a false speech. Though, he clearly says that some speeches are absurd, he does not distinguish them from false ones. He writes:

Speech may also be absurd and insignificant; as when there is a succession of words, to which there can be no succession of thoughts in mind to answer them; and this happens often to such, as, understanding nothing in some subtle matter, do, nevertheless, to make others believe they understand, speak of the same incoherently; for the connection of incoherent words, though it want the end of speech (which is signification) yet it is speech; ~~and~~ is used by writers of metaphysics almost as frequently as speech significative.<sup>32</sup>

The following is a passage where Hobbes uses the word "false" as well as "absurd" for one and the same speech,

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32. EW, Vol. I, pp. 29-30.

where by "false" he means what we mean by "meaningless".

He writes:

For example, if it be a false affirmation to say a quadrangle is round, the word round quadrangle signifies nothing, but is a mere sound. So likewise, if it be false to say that virtue can be poured, or blown up and down, the words inpoured virtue, inblown virtue, are as absurd and insignificant as a round quadrangle.<sup>33</sup>

Hobbes' own position can be refined by maintaining the distinction between false and meaningless speeches. Any combination of words cannot provide us a meaningful speech. For example two contradictory names cannot be used to form a meaningful speech. Nevertheless, whenever a name belonging to one category is copulated with a name belonging to another category, then the speech becomes meaningless. A speech will be meaningful only when a name belonging to one category is copulated with another name belonging to the same category, for only then it is possible to have an idea i.e. it is possible to see some identity and difference in ideas. Hobbes recognises four main categories: names of bodies, names of accidents, names of phantasms and names of names.<sup>34</sup> This is because no simple name which is universal

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33. EW, Vol. III, p.27.

34. EW, Vol. I, p.58.

can be used to define a name belonging to another category. In case it is so used, the name defined also will belong to the same category to which the definiens belong.

"True" and "false" are the characteristics of the speeches, not of the things or facts. Speech is one which is used by some one to communicate something to others. That is to say in Strawsonian terms: only a use of a sentence is true or false. This point has been best brought out in the following passage by Hobbes himself:

And from hence it is evident, that truth and falsity have no place but amongst such living creatures as use speech. For though some brute creatures, looking upon the image of a man in a glass, may be affected with it, as if it were the man himself, and for this reason fear it or fawn upon it in vain; yet they do not apprehend it as true or false, but only as like; and in this they are not deceived.<sup>35</sup>

Little earlier to the above passage he wrote:

Now these words true, truth, and true proposition, are equivalent to one another; for truth consists in speech, and not in the things spoken of; and though true be sometimes opposed to apparent or feigned, yet it is always to be referred to the truth of proposition...<sup>36</sup>

When should we call a speech true or false? In order to seek some answer to this question we must have to go into

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35. Ibid., p.36.

36. Ibid., p.35.

the details of extension of words and the parts of speech. First of all we will take up the discussion on extensions.

Every name which is significant has some extension. Extension is one to which a name refers. A proper name refers to only one individual, therefore it has least extension. If there is a name which refers to two things, then it has wider extension in comparison to a proper name. All other names which are not proper should be called common names irrespective of their extension. Even different common names have different extension, for "man" has an extension lesser than that of "living creature".<sup>37</sup> There is another term for extension of a name, that is "comprehension". "Living creature" comprehends not only all men, but also animals. In the language of mathematics one can reasonably say that "man" is a subset of "living creature". There are certain names which have same extension; e.g. "man" and "rational-living-creature". (The definition of "man" has changed in the modern times; now we also believe animals have some rationality. However this does not affect the force of the argument; one can very well choose different examples or redefine the term "man".)

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37. Ibid., p.30.

The distinction between the subject and the predicate of a proposition which is expressed in a speech is not that of grammarians. It is not important whether the subject occurs or must occur always first in a speech. To find out which is a subject, we have to follow the following procedure:<sup>38</sup> No proper name can be a predicate of a common name, for a common name has always greater extension than that of a proper name, and the subject of a proposition is always the one which is contained or which has less or equivalent comprehension than that of predicate or the containing name. Hobbes writes:

A proposition is a speech consisting of two names copulated, by which he that speaketh signifies he conceives the latter name to be the name of the same thing whereof the former is the name; or (which is all one) that the former name is comprehended by the latter.<sup>39</sup>

The above passage should not be taken as the definition of proposition, though Hobbes gives it as the definition of a proposition. If this be treated as the definition of a proposition, then Hobbes will not be in a position to explain

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38. This is not what Hobbes has suggested, but one can reasonably come to this conclusion from his writings.

39. Ibid., p.30. It may be noted that Hobbes is offering a purely linguistic understanding or interpretation of what a proposition is. Hobbes nowhere analyses a proposition in terms of a judgement or a belief. For fuller discussion of this point see Dorothea Krook: 'Thomas Hobbes's Doctrine of Meaning and Truth', Philosophy, Vol. XXXI, 1956.

a false proposition, where no part or whole of the comprehension of a name is part or whole of another name occurring as a subject or predicate. The above definition should be treated as the definition of a true proposition. If a sentence consists of two names, and if the comprehension of the predicate is either the same or greater in extension, then the proposition is true, otherwise false. When there is an identity proposition like "Man is a rational living creature", the proposition is true not because the predicate "a rational living creature" has more extension, but because both of them, the subject and the predicate, have the same extension. Instead of writing "Man is a rational living creature" one can write it also as "A rational living creature is a Man". But we cannot reverse the order of the speech "Man is a living creature" for "living creature" has greater extension than that of "man"; therefore "living creature" cannot be the subject of the speech, and "man", the predicate. However, in a speech it is the order of the occurrence of the terms, supported by the grammatical rules, which helps us to find out the subject and predicate of the sentence. For example, instead of "Man is a living creature", we can write "The one who is a living creature, is man". If the predicate name comprehends the subject name, then the speech is said to be necessary, for it is true for all

times. This can happen in two ways: (1) both the subject and predicate have the same extension i.e. the definiendum and the definiens refer to the same idea and (2) the predicate has more extension, e.g., "Man is a living creature". Thus, Hobbes writes commenting on necessary truth:

From hence also it is manifest, that truth adheres not to things, but to speech only, for some truths are eternal; for it will be eternally true, if man, then living creature; but that any man, or living creature, should exist eternally, is not necessary.<sup>40</sup>

If a categorical proposition is necessary, then its hypothetical form also must be necessary, but this is not true of contingent propositions. This happens because truth of a necessary proposition depends solely on the comprehension the names involved have because of the way they are defined.

It should be noted that all necessary propositions involve only common ~~names~~. In other words, any singular proposition where there occurs one proper name as the subject of the proposition and a common name as the predicate is not necessary. However, such exceptions are there: (1) any definition of a proper name also will be necessary and (2) if there are two or more synonymous proper names in a proposition

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40. Ibid., p.38.



which is an identity proposition, it will be necessary. These **are** also necessary for the reason that both the definiens and the definendum express the same idea, and in the case of synonymous proper names also, they stand for the same idea.

It will be certainly a mistake to think that any proposition consisting of only common names has to be either necessarily true or necessarily false. Hobbes gives an example where the speech involves only common names **yet** the speech being not necessarily true. "Crows are black" is a true proposition now, but may turn out to be false in future. Such a proposition is true not because the comprehension of one name is the comprehension of another, but both the ~~names~~ are found to be coextensive. But, it is accidental that they are coextensive. There is no logical necessity that they must be always coextensive. It can happen that due to geological and biological changes in nature we will discover a new species which is a crow but not black. Hobbes calls such propositions contingent: whose truth value is not necessary. Hobbes takes the speech "Every man is a liar" as contingently true. This happens because "man" and "liar" are coextensive, though one name is not inclusive of another in extension. It can happen sometime in future that if even a single man is discovered

who never spoke a lie, the speech at that time would turn out to be false as both "man" and "liar" will not be coextensive.<sup>41</sup> All those propositions which involve a proper name and a common name, where the proper name is the subject and the other predicate, are contingent (except in those cases where the definiens and definiendum constitute the proposition). This is because, they cannot be coextensive nor is it the case that the extension of the predicate name necessarily involves the extension of the subject name. Though a contingent categorical proposition is true, when it is put in a hypothetical form it turns out to be false e.g. "Every crow is black" is true ( in those days of Hobbes) but it turns out to be false if we put it in the form "If anything be a crow, then it is black".<sup>42</sup> When put in a hypothetical form, if the speech is necessarily true, it guarantees the truth of the proposition for all time to come, otherwise, there will be some element of doubt. Therefore such contingently true propositions will be deemed to be false when they are put in a hypothetical form.

There are certain propositions which are necessarily false. It should be remembered here that for Hobbes all

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41. These points have been brought out, though crudely, by Hobbes in EW, Vol. I. , p.38.; also see EW, Vol. III, p.23.

42. EW, Vol. I, p.39.

meaningless speeches are also necessarily false. But if we maintain the distinction between meaningless and false, the way we have brought them about, a good example of this sort will be: "'Socrates is a man' is a necessary proposition."<sup>43</sup> This is a necessarily false proposition because any proposition of the kind: a proper name copulated with a common name will not be necessarily true. Therefore, the above proposition has to be necessarily false. This is not a meaningless speech for there are no contradictory names involved nor any two names belonging to different categories.

Language is a social institution which has to grow in a society. The errors are possible in perception which no human being can stop completely, but grave errors in language are due to the negligence of the users of language. It is not practically possible to have all knowledge by ones own experience and experimentation. One is bound to learn many things from others by using language. If many people use their own signs in different ways, it is practically impossible to handle language effectively. Here is a passage from Hobbes which emphasizes the social dimension of language:

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43. Ibid., p.60.

This kind of error only deserves the name of falsity, as arising, not from sense, nor from the things themselves, but from pronouncing rashly; for names have their constitution, not from the species of things, but from the will and consent of men. And hence it comes to pass, that men pronounce falsely, by their own negligence, in departing from such appellations of things as are agreed upon...<sup>44</sup>

While speaking of the "errors which happen in reasoning", Hobbes talks of a "sevenfold incoherency of names". According to him all such misuse of language or copulation of different things together result in false propositions. Recalling our suggestion that Hobbes fails to make a distinction between false and meaningless propositions, we can briefly consider it as suggesting misleading or meaningless expressions. It is interesting to find Hobbes anticipating Ryle's 'category mistake' when he proposes a table of the seven possible ways of confusing different things together. The table has been referred to as the Table of Absurdity by E.S. Morris.<sup>45</sup>

Hobbes says:

... in every true proposition, it is necessary that the names copulated, be both of them names

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44. EW, Vol. I, p.56 (earlier italics ours)

45. See Engle S. Morris: 'Hobbes' Table of Absurdity', Philosophical Review, Vol. 70, 1961.

of bodies, or both names of accidents, or both names of phantasms, or both names of names. For names otherwise copulated are incoherent... It may happen, also, that the name of a body, of an accident, or of a phantasm, may be copulated with the name of a speech.<sup>46</sup>

Surely, what Hobbes manifestly is suggesting is that concepts (names?) belonging to different categories cannot be equated or assimilated together without giving rise to semantic or even sometimes logical errors.

Hobbes must be given sufficient credit for many insights in the functioning of language which we believe can be developed further to a great extent. However, there are some **shortcomings** in his position which cannot be overlooked. Any student of philosophy will not be happy about treating names and concepts in the same way. The way a proper name behaves in a language is significantly different from that of a concept, and any such treatment is bound to bring certain amount of confusion and lack of clarity to anyone.

It is astonishing that Hobbes thinks that a man has to re-learn what he has learnt by observation or experiment if he does not associate his ideas with some marks or signs.<sup>47</sup>

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46. EW, Vol. I, p.58.

47. EW, Vol. III, p.22.

In fact most of our conceptions do not have one word to express them. Our language has creative capacity. We can produce innumerable number of sentences expressing different thoughts and concepts with a limited number of words. If Hobbes were right, then we needed as many number of words to retain them as part of human knowledge as the meaningful sentences a language is competent to produce. Though there will be a limitation with less number of words, but if we have an unreasonable bulk of words the language will be unmanageable and less effective.

The distinction between a speech and a proposition seems to be quite redundant as he ascribes 'truth' and 'falsity' to the uses of speeches as well. There is no need in Hobbesian framework to hypostatise an entity like "proposition" and therefore we have used the terms "speech" and "proposition" almost synonymously.

The notion of extension seems to be very shaky. How do we know that a particular concept has less extension than that of another? By observing each and every instance of them? or by knowing the meaning of the words? As there does not seem to be any necessary relationship between meaning and truth of a sentence in Hobbesian philosophy, this question cannot be answered satisfactorily.

The language is treated as an ideal language where Hobbes thinks that we must use language according to strict rules. If this is to be done, major part of life people have to spend in learning the definitions of different words. However, the careless<sup>-ness</sup> and misuse of words by many metaphysicians has been rightly pointed out by Hobbes.

### (ii) Hobbes' Theory of Moral Language

Hobbes, like Wittgenstein, believes in the various functions of language. These different uses of language are called different 'language games' by Wittgenstein. Naming, stating, describing, requesting, commanding etc. are different language games. Similarly for Hobbes, descriptions, commands, interrogations, requests, wish, prayer etc. are different forms of speech. These forms of speech perform different functions in language.

Hobbes derives his idea of moral language from these special forms of speech. But before going into his views on the nature of moral language, we shall first throw some light on his moral theory so as to facilitate our discussion.

Hobbes believes that man proceeds from the state of nature to the civil state. In the state of nature there is no objective morality. Men act according to their appetites

and aversions. What man desires is good and what he hates is bad. The terms like 'good' and 'bad' are used with relation to the person that uses them. The notions of 'right' and 'wrong', 'justice' and 'injustice' do not find their legitimate expression in such a state. As Hobbes says, "they are qualities, that relate to men in society, not in solitude".<sup>48</sup> Moral obligation has no place in the state of nature.

Hobbes talks of natural laws as moral laws because they deal with the conduct of men and manners which consist in moral virtues like justice or equity and all habits of mind that conduce to peace and charity. These laws of nature are rules of conduct and to establish peace and security the general observance of these rules is necessary. Hence, these laws are called moral laws. For Hobbes, civil laws presuppose laws of nature which are commands of God. The laws of nature indicate human propensities and tendencies whose objective expression is effected by the intervention of the authority of the sovereign in the state of commonwealth. Hobbes seems to imply that the necessity of following the laws of nature becomes apparent only when reason enables

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48. EW, Vol. III, p.115.



us to see under what arrangement peace and equity can be ensured which ultimately aim at self-preservation. Mostly it is the fear of death which pushes man to institute the sovereign authority through common consent. Hobbes thinks that in the state of nature, everyone is naturally equal and, at least theoretically, no one can feel secure against others. Everyone being equally vulnerable, mutual fear and reciprocal danger is the natural consequence. This state of affairs undermines the aim of self-preservation for all and hence, the natural propensities with which God has endowed them (i.e. laws of nature) open the way for a mutually secure and beneficial state of commonwealth. These laws are not followed in the absence of an authority who can enforce them. When the commonwealth is instituted and the sovereign comes into power, civil laws are made. These laws are made in the interest of all the people i.e. for peace and equity. Morality becomes objective ( in the **civil** state) in the sense that rightness or wrongness of actions are judged according to the rules made by the sovereign to establish equity, law and justice for all people. Moral judgements are objective in civil state, though not in the sense in which an objectivist like Moore has accepted them. For Moore, if the actual consequences of an action are good,

then that action is right.<sup>49</sup> But in Hobbes' system, objectivity of moral judgement is derived from the rules. These rules are made keeping in view the interest of all subjects. He holds that it is for the sovereign:

... to make some common rules for all men, and to declare them publicly, by which every man may know what may be called... just, what unjust... what good, what evil.<sup>50</sup>

Now, with the possibility of morality having been shown, we are in a better position to talk about the nature and role of moral language. The nature of moral language in the civil state appears to be imperative and expressive. Hobbes says:

The language of desire, and aversion, is imperative; as do this, forbear that; which when the party is obliged to do, or forbear, is command; otherwise prayer; or else counsel. The language of vainglory, of indignation, pity and revengefulness, optative.<sup>51</sup>

Since for Hobbes, moral terms are related to our desire and aversion, both the above stated features of language or what he prefers to call 'forms of speech' can be discerned in the use of moral language.

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49. See, G.E. Moore : Principia Ethica, Ch. V, Sect., 89.

50. Phil. Rudiments,..., EW, Vol. II, p.77.

51. EW, Vol. III, p.50.

Hobbes seems to understand the nature of moral language as both prescriptive and optative. The former feature includes various functions of moral language besides issuing commands, e.g. requesting and advising. The latter assimilates under the term 'optative' various emotive uses of moral language such as expression of pity, vindictiveness, anger, hate or dislike.

Hobbes accepts that one of the main functions of moral language is to prescribe or to direct someone to do something. Laws, which are rules to tell people what is right or wrong, what is good, bad just and unjust and other forms of morally virtuous acts are in the form of commands. Everyone should act according to them if he wants to acquire his own good as well as the common good. Hobbes says that the "legislator commands what is good for people and he forbids what is evil."<sup>52</sup> Moral distinctions are derived from the sovereign's will (the sovereign's will is the union of the wills of all the people). People are morally bound to obey his commands, because by their mutual agreement they have covenanted to obey his commands. These commands are for the benefit of the people and it is one's duty to observe one's own interest.

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52. Phil. Rudiments..., EW, Vol. II, p.150.

Here it may be pointed out that Hobbes' definition of command is not compatible with the view that it is always given in the interest of people. For instance, when he distinguishes between counsel and command, he explains the nature of commands by suggesting that a command is given when a man says, 'Do this, Do not do this' without there being any reason other than the will of the one who commands. He "pretends his own benefit". In case of a counsel, when "a man says, do or do not do this", he pretends only the good of him whom he gives it.<sup>53</sup>

The difference between counsel and command is that a command is directed to one's own benefit and a counsel to the benefit of another man. One may object that if we admit that commands are given by the sovereign for his benefit, and not for the benefit of the people, then it becomes inconsistent with the way Hobbes has defined the commonwealth in terms of peace, security and more contented life of the subjects, for whose attainment, the observance of justice, equity, modesty and mercy is necessary.

Hobbes accepts that commands are given for the interest of the giver but at the same time he says that those

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53. EW, Vol. III, p.241.

commands which are issued by the sovereign are not mere commands. They are more than that; these commands are laws. Commands can be given by anyone to anyone but laws cannot. They are always in the interest of those persons who obey them. Laws are not made by one person, but by the consent of the whole commonwealth. They are enforced by a common power, which is derived from the wills of men who constitute a commonwealth. This power is required to direct men's actions to the common benefit. Where there is no commonwealth, there are no laws. According to Hobbes:

The law of nature... are not properly laws, but qualities that dispose men to peace and obedience. When a commonwealth is once settled, then are they actually laws, and not before...<sup>54</sup>

In the state of nature, though natural laws are there but they are not obligatory because they do not have any prescriptive force. They derive their prescriptive force from the sovereign. In the civil state all laws become obligatory. They are for the interest of the people because the sovereign's will is the embodiment and manifestation of the wills of all the individuals. The good of the sovereign and people can not be separated. Hence

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54. Ibid., p.253.

the will of the sovereign is conceived as some sort of unity of wills with which the interest of all is identified. Whether such an abstraction is practically possible is a separate question.

Counsel which is another use of prescriptive language, is also used to direct people with regard to what is good or bad for them. But counsels are not laws. The person who gives counsel cannot enforce his counsel on the person whom he is giving the counsel. A person is free to act or not to act according to the given counsel.

In the context of prescriptiveness of moral language, it need not be gainsaid that it must also be universalizable. 'Always tell the truth' is a universal prescriptive statement because it is addressed not only to one person but to all. When we say 'one ought to do this' then that action, if it is obligatory for one person, would be equally obligatory for any other person under the same circumstances. If I say 'you ought to do x' and in exactly similar circumstances I myself don't do it then I am making a logical error, because if I am prescribing someone to do some action in certain circumstances, then I am making this statement by presupposing that if I or anybody else would have been in the same situation I or he would do the same thing which I am prescribing. He says: 'Do not that to another, which

thou wouldest not have done to thyself."<sup>55</sup> While weighing the actions of another man one should put himself in other's place and then decide what would be his course of action if he were in that place. These laws which are prescriptive as well as universalizable must be such as are agreeable to the reason of all men.

Thus, Hobbes' theory of moral language contains both the elements of prescriptivity and universalizability in it.

Now we shall discuss some other functions of moral language. These are expressing feelings and emotions, guiding choices, praising etc.

To praise something is to signify that particular thing is good. To say that something is good is to say that it is what it ought to be. When we say that for a person P a particular action is good, we are indicating that every one who is in circumstances similar to those of P, should perform the same sort of action. By praising we persuade people to do those actions. It is to guide a person by suggesting grounds for his choice.

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55. Ibid., p.144.

Hobbes also admits that one of the features of moral language is its emotive function. He says that those forms of speech by which our passions are expressed are 'voluntary significations' of our passions i.e. we signify our emotions through this language. According to this view one might consider Hobbes as an emotivist. It is definitely true that Hobbes considers emotive function as one of the functions of moral language but we can not say that, for Hobbes, emotive function is the only function of moral language. This point is amply clear from the special uses of speech and from his political and social philosophy. It is definitely a mistake to characterize Hobbes' ethical views as extreme emotivistic though he recognizes the emotive force of moral terms and judgements.

Hobbes appears to have roughly anticipated Nowell-Smith's approach where the latter understands the nature of moral language in terms of what is sometimes called multifunctionalism. According to Nowell-Smith:

... value words are used to express tastes and preferences, to express decisions and choices, to criticize, grade and evaluate, to advise, admonish, warn, persuade and dissuade, to praise, encourage and reprove, to promulgate and draw attention to rules and doubtless for other purposes also...<sup>56</sup>

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56. Nowell-Smith, P.H. : Ethics, Penguin Books, 1954, p.98.



The close relationship between morals and passions, which has been admitted by Aristotle,<sup>57</sup> earlier to Hobbes and Hume and others after him, has been clearly recognized by Hobbes as well. But he is also alive to the functional nature of moral language which is expressed in various sorts of moral judgements that we make. Notable among these are, prescriptive, commendatory, and optative uses of moral language. But the emotive use is not the only use which can be added to above listed functions. While he talks of the form of speech by which passions are expressed, he does recognize a feature of this language which is accepted by discriptivists in general, i.e. all passions may be expressed indicatively. He remarks:

The forms of speech by which the passions are expressed, are partly the same, and partly different from those, by which we express our thoughts. And first, generally all passions may be expressed indicatively; as I love, I fear, I joy, I deliberate, I will, I command...<sup>58</sup>

Through language of passions we are not just expressing our ideas but we are doing something more; we are making a promise, issuing a command and so on and so forth. It is

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57. Aristotle : Nichomachean Ethics, tr. J.A.K. Thomson, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953.

58. EW, Vol. III, p.49.

used to signify our conceptions i.e. we express our thoughts through it. Can we call these forms of speech 'performative utterances' in Austin's terminology? Austin said that there are two kinds of utterances: "Constative and performative. Constative utterances have the property of being true or false. They are statements of fact. Performative utterance can never be true or false; it is used to perform an action."<sup>59</sup> For example, when I say 'I promise', I am performing an act of promising, or when I say, 'I command', I am performing an act of commanding. But if I say, 'he promised' or 'he promises', then I am describing or reporting an act of promising and I am not performing one. But how do we know whether someone is stating a fact or performing an act when he utters - 'There is a snake behind you'? Austin says that any speech-act comprises three sub-acts. These are what he calls locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary act is the utterance of certain words with a certain meaning. Illocutionary act is the act that someone performs when he is uttering these words, e.g. he is making a promise, he is issuing a command etc. For Austin such acts as promising, commanding or requesting are illocutionary acts which are

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59. Austin, J. - 'Performative-Constative', Philosophy and Ordinary Language, Ed. C.E. Caton (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1963), p.22.

performed by the expressions which, so to say, possess illocutionary force. The perlocutionary act is the effect that is brought about on the addressee through the illocutionary acts. The distinction between the illocutionary and perlocutionary forces of an utterance is the one that is found between warning or persuading someone and his being actually warned or persuaded. An act of utterance may combine all the three linguistic acts. But some times it may not. It is, however, not necessary that a locutionary act which is intended to perform an illocutionary act may also lead to the relevant perlocutionary act. That is, one may succeed or fail to succeed in bringing about the desired effect on others. One may issue a warning (illocutionary act) and yet the person concerned may not be warned (perlocutionary act).

What function an utterance is performing can be known from the illocutionary force of the utterance. When I say to someone, 'There is a snake behind you', I am not just stating a fact. Rather, I am warning him and expecting him to move out from that place. Similarly, if I say 'Shut the door!', then I am ordering someone to shut the door.

Austin holds that to know what force does an utterance have, we have to take into account such devices as intonation, or gesture of the speaker and the context in which the words

are uttered. For example, the utterance 'There is a snake behind you' is a statement of fact or a warning, can be known from the intonation, the gesture and the context which must include the intention of the speaker.

As we have seen, these performative utterances are not true or false but they are happy or unhappy. Suppose if I utter a sentence, 'I promise...', and I do not fulfill that promise then it is an unhappy or an insincere utterance. Taking another instance, if I utter, 'There is a snake behind you', and at the time of uttering this statement there is no snake around, then my utterance is not a happy one.

According to Hobbes if a person does not keep his promise, then his promise is invalid and to promise that which is known to be impossible is not a valid promise. In this context Hobbes observes:

A covenant (which may also be called a promise) not to defend myself from force, by force, is always void. For no man can transfer, or lay down his right to save himself from death,..60

Similarly, if a person is giving a counsel to another person, then that counsel should be apt for that occasion. Counsel should be consistent with the aims and end of the person

who is counselled. Hobbes says that <sup>for a</sup> person to be 'a good counsellor' for commonwealth, he must know 'the business of a commonwealth' which is "to preserve the people in peace at home, and defend them against foreign invasion..."<sup>61</sup>

The same is true of all other performative utterances. When they are used to perform some action and if that action is fulfilled then that performative utterance is a happy or apt one, otherwise unhappy or inept. In other words, if after performing an illocutionary act the perlocutionary act which follows it is not what we wanted to perform, then our performative utterance is an unhappy one.

For Hobbes moral judgements are not mere factual statements in a straight forward sense. Though moral judgements, as we have already seen, have some indicative element, they also combine several other features and functions.

In the light of what has preceded, it may be misleading to use the terms 'true' or 'false', without qualification, for moral judgements. 'True' and 'false' are the properties of that speech which is called proposition in which either the predicate is the name of the subject or both in some sense

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61. Ibid., p.246.

are coextensive. Moral judgements, for Hobbes, are definitely more than this. Moral judgements are performative utterances. For example, if for an action X, I say 'X is right', then I am not just stating the fact that X is right but at the same time I am prescribing people to do X. But as we have already noted, moral language for Hobbes is a complex form of speech and describing and prescribing are not its only function. There are some other functions also as expressions of emotions, advising, praising etc. If I say 'you ought to do this' it means that I advise you to do this. The function of moral judgements is to move people to action and this can not be done by simple descriptive statements of fact. Statements of fact describe or report something and they are true if they correspond to the facts they are representing. On the other hand, moral judgements do not simply state facts and they are, therefore, not true or false in the ordinary sense. As Hobbes says, they are significant or insignificant. According to him:

Speech may also be absurd and insignificant, as when there is a succession of words, to which there can be no succession of thoughts in mind to answer them...<sup>62</sup>

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62. EW, Vol. I, pp. 29-30.

To repeat the point we have already made, when a person X promises to a person Y to do some action and he has no intentions of fulfilling the promise he has made, his speech is insignificant and absurd. Thus moral judgements are not objectively true in the sense in which the cognitivists believe that they are.

These moral judgements are justified according to the civil laws in Hobbes' system. Civil laws are based on moral laws or natural laws as Hobbes calls them. Natural laws are eternal and immutable. Civil laws are universal which means that each and every person of the commonwealth is bound by these laws. As Hobbes explains:

By civil laws, I understand the laws, that men are therefore bound to observe, because they are members, not of this, or that commonwealth in particular, but of a commonwealth.<sup>63</sup>

Though Hobbes admits that moral judgements are used to perform various functions such as commanding, advising, praising, expressing emotions etc., he nevertheless does not clearly state which of the functions of moral language is primary: prescriptive, emotive or indicative. Since Hobbes has admitted a close relationship between morals and

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63. EW, Vol. III, p.250.

passions, it seems that he considers the imperative or prescriptive as main functions of moral language. He says that - "the language of desire, and aversion, is imperative"<sup>64</sup> and the kind of speech which signifies the desire and aversion and other passions in man is the same.

Hobbes in his normative ethics accepts utilitarianism and in his meta-ethics he is a prescriptivist. We can see that as a utilitarian he is not inconsistent in accepting prescriptivism as his meta-ethical theory. The way Hobbes has defined the commonwealth (in terms of subject's peace, security and more contented life) and his position concerning the observance of justice, equity, modesty and reciprocal mercy as the basis of common wealth, appears to make the utilitarian morality the only regulative principle of ethics within which the various prescriptive and emotive functions of moral judgements can be accommodated without inconsistency. This conclusion seems to follow, on the one hand, from his views concerning 'special uses of speech' and, on the other hand, from his political and social philosophy.

Now, if moral judgements are prescriptions the question arises: How are they justifiable? In moral

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64. Ibid., p.50.



philosophy we talk about justification in two senses: (1) Justification of principles (2) justification of particular moral judgements, i.e. judgements about particular acts. According to the first sense of justification one has to justify the principle of a system or a theory. For example, if we take utilitarian system, we may ask how is the principle of utility justifiable? And if one answers that the test of the moral principle is to be found in particular judgements, we can then ask what is now the test of particular judgements. But to justify particular judgements one will have to refer to some principles. Thus particular moral judgements cannot be the justification of moral principles. The next answer we can get is that less fundamental principles can be justified with reference to some more fundamental principles. But if we are engaged in this process, we will go on and on and there will be no end because to justify some principles we will take some other principles and thus the process will continue ad infinitum.

In order to arrive at some basis to stop this infinite regress, we will have to accept some ultimate principle and then it would seem to be the case that nothing further could be said in its justification i.e. ultimate principles are not justifiable. As Mill says:

... questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof". But, "the subject is well within the cognizance of rational faculty."<sup>65</sup>

Similarly Kant says:

.... the ground of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man or in the circumstances in which he is placed but sought a priori solely in the concepts of pure reason....<sup>66</sup>

Again, the same question arises with regard to particular moral judgements: How are they justifiable? We have already shown that moral judgements are not true or false or they are not verifiable in empirical sense.

Suppose, for example, a person says, "You ought to tell the truth" and if I question him, "Why"? Then he cannot say: 'Because it is true or false but to answer my question he will have to provide some reasons which would come under some principle of the system he accepts. It is in this way that he can justify his statement.

Moral judgements can be justified according to the principle under which they are subsumable, e.g. if one asks:

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65. Mill - Utilitarianism, Cleveland, The World Pub. Co., 1962.

66. Kant - Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Indianapolis Bobbs Merrill, 1949.

'Why is this action wrong?', the answer could be: 'Because this comes under the principle A'. Thus, to justify those moral judgements which are prescriptive in nature, we appeal to the underlying principles of that system. In Hobbes' system also moral judgements are prescriptive in nature. Therefore, the question of their truth and falsity does not arise. To justify these judgement we will have to take help from the principles of the system he is accepting..

Hobbes' civil laws are commands and they are based on the utilitarian principles. If someone asks: 'Why one ought to obey civil laws or how these commands are justifiable?' then the answer he will get is that by obeying these commands one will promote public good, because these laws are made keeping in view the demands of justice, equity and other moral virtues which<sup>are</sup> in the interest of all the members of the community.

Thus, within Hobbes' system of ethics, moral judgements are justified according to the principle on which they are based. If a law or a counsel is conducive to the public utility, it is justified, otherwise not. To sum up, the way Hobbes has explicated his position, it becomes clear that, for him, particular moral actions are justifiable with reference to general rules or laws which, in their turn, can only be justified by applying the test of public utility.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the concluding chapter we are perhaps in a more convenient position to have a more judicious as well as a general look at Hobbes' ethical ideas. But before this, we may recapitulate some of the main points we have so far made or observed about Hobbes.

Hobbes is often considered to be an egoist by most of the writers on ethics. It is generally believed that for him, man always merely aims at his own preservation and happiness. Whatever he does, leads to his own happiness. Those actions which seem to be other-regarding are also egoistic. Rogers says:

Hobbist Egoism owing to its omnisive character may be called exclusive. It ignores the fact that the Ego is essentially social and consequently has in different degree aiming at the good of other men a good from which it may not distinguish its own.<sup>1</sup>

Butler's objection against egoism begins with his account of various parts of human nature, of which there are particular passions and appetite, self love, benevolence

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1. Rogers, R.A.P. - A Short History of Ethics, Macmillan, 1948, p.38.

and conscience. For him, benevolence is also as much a part of human nature as self-love is. He says that man's primary aim is self-love, but there are some elements in his nature which lead him to other regarding actions.

The other interpretation of Hobbes by A.E. Taylor is:

Hobbes's ethical doctrine, disengaged from an egoistic psychology with which it has no logically necessary connexion, is a very strict deontology though with interesting differences of some of the characteristic thesis of Kant.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that there are some similarities between Hobbes and Kant. Hobbes might agree with Kant on the imperative character of moral laws. Hobbes accepts that laws of nature may be known by reason and also he tries to show that breach of covenant is a kind of logical absurdity. But the obligatory character of natural law, for him, does not come from its rational form. Their rational nature shows that they are knowable without special promulgation as God's command. As Hobbes says: "to the nature of laws belongs a sufficient and clear promulgation, such as may, take away the excuse of ignorance."

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2. Taylor, A.E. - 'The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes; Philosophy, Vol. XIII (1938), pp.406-24.

As regards Hobbes' laws of nature, even if we regard them as having intrinsic value, they are not conceived as obligatory, unless they are accepted and expressed as such in the civil state by the sovereign, who alone has the authority and power to enact. Since the laws of nature, when imposed and regulated by the monarch, become covenants as seeking and following peace, which is ensured through mutual contract among people on the one hand, and between the people and the sovereign on the other, the laws appear as covenants. And therefore, as Hobbes appears to hold, covenants oblige, not because covenant breaking is a self-contradiction, but because the keeping of covenants is a way of seeking peace and preservation.

We would not go into the details of Taylor's thesis, but we have made it amply clear that Hobbes is not a deontologist as Taylor thought him to be.

We have shown that Hobbes is an egoist, but he is a psychological egoist and not an ethical egoist. We have also explained that it is only in the state of nature that Hobbes accepts psychological egoism. He says that man by nature moves towards his self-interest but he never holds that people ought to act only for their own interest.

We have maintained that when Hobbesian man comes to civil state he restricts his egoistic passions. He now

considers his own good as well as public good, because public good is conducive to his own good. Hobbes here takes a turn toward utilitarianism. He believes not merely in pursuing the maximum happiness of himself, but in promoting the maximum happiness of multitude of people. Further, we have shown that Hobbes accepts rule-utilitarianism. He argues that actions are justifiable with reference to certain rules and those rules which are made for the public good are the measure of right and wrong. We have seen that Hobbes does not accept the retributive theory of punishment; rather, he accepts the utilitarian theory of punishment which has the convenience of combining the elements of truth contained in the preventive as well as reformative theories of punishment.

While discussing the moral concepts that Hobbes uses in his moral philosophy, we have shown that the concept "good" is used relatively and subjectively in the state of nature. But when civil state comes into existence what is good is decided by the sovereign. "Good" becomes objective in the sense that good of one individual is generally not different from another and there is a common measure between them.

The concepts of right and wrong have no place in the state of nature. They assure their significant uses

in the civil state, since what is right or wrong is determined by the sovereign.

We have seen that Hobbes accepts two kinds of obligations: inforo interno and inforo externo. In our brief examination of Warrender's view we have shown that Warrender is not consistent with his view that for Hobbes there are obligations in the state of nature. Obligations arise when there is someone to enforce them. But for Hobbes, it is not only the case that in the civil state obligations or duties arise, but they also become moral obligations because right or wrong also arise within the commonwealth.

The last ethical concept we have discussed is justice. For Hobbes, the concept of justice has no relevance in the state of nature; when the sovereign comes into being by a social contract, the performance of this covenant becomes the ground of justice. We have shown that Hobbes accepts the utilitarian concept of justice.

As regards Hobbes' philosophy of language, we have noted that he comes very close to a purely linguistic interpretation of propositions and the semantic concept of truth. He is alive to the Wittgensteinian emphasis on the 'use' of speech and the functional nature of language. He



also appears to have anticipated Ryle's concept of the 'category mistake' in explaining the sources of errors in reasoning.

While discussing his theory of moral language we have shown that for Hobbes the nature of moral language is primarily prescriptive. He recognizes the emotive force of moral terms and judgements. We have maintained that he anticipates Nowell-Smith's view regarding moral language which has been termed as "multifunctionalism". Further, we have also shown that these expressions (moral judgements) are not only prescriptive or imperative but they are also expressed indicatively. Moral judgements are not true or false in the ordinary sense and they derive their justification from the principles on which they are based.

Thus, Hobbes is not a deontologist nor is he an extreme egoist. Rather, in the state of nature he is a psychological egoist, and in the civil state, he is a utilitarian. Hence it is the last category of ethical theories which aptly describes Hobbes' theory. For him, it is indeed the civil state within which ethical concepts have their relevance and outside of which it has no application.

Now let us see how far Hobbes' ideas (those we have discussed above) are consistent with his system.

According to Hobbes the philosophical knowledge is identified with linguistic truths and this can be sought through clarity of definitions and meanings. The emphasis on these things was introduced by Hobbes as the explanation for the success of the scientists. The nature of truth consists in true reasoning and precise definition. The task of philosophical reasoning is not to disclose the true nature of things, but to enable us to arrive at the consequences of general names agreed upon. Hobbes was, of course, thinking not of experimental or purely practical sciences but of a science like theoretical physics. And his 'general names' are the concepts or ideas which he took to be our only approach to such knowledge.

The meaning of a word cannot be a thing otherwise all moral terms will be meaningless. But Hobbes believes that we use the terms 'good' and 'bad' significantly. Moral terms signify the state of their authors, not of the objects to which they refer. The phrase 'the state of their author' does not mean only the psychological state but it also includes the total human situation under linguistic, social, political and legal frames of reference. Since for Hobbes, moral terms draw their currency and propriety within the

civil state as envisaged by him, they have to be correlated with the laws of the state and the nature of the sovereign who wields both political as well as moral authority.

When Hobbes talks about the language of passions he says that passions are expressed partly emotively and partly indicatively but he fails to make this point quite clear as to how these expressions are partly indicative. It seems that he means (and it seems quite plausible in the light of what we have already seen) that these expressions have two functions, one of requesting, commanding, advising, promising, willing etc., and the other of stating something or indicating something. For example, when I say 'I promise' by expressing this I am indicating that 'I promise....' and at the same time I am performing an act, that is, of promising. Hobbes considers these utterances as performative utterances but he is not quite precise in making this point.

Hobbes' state of nature is not a historical state. He does not say that man ever was or will be in such a state. He states some facts about human nature and explains how it is possible to establish a society. He says that fear of death is not the only reason which inclines men to peace but 'desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living' also leads men to peace. Hobbes' egoism is not inconsistent with his theory of civil state, i.e. the

mutual surrender of private desire to the will of the sovereign. The will of the sovereign is not separate from the people's will. In other words, we can say that it is constituted of peoples' will. That is the reason why in practice peoples' will can be identified with the sovereign's will. Thus, Hobbes is not inconsistent with his view that man is egoistic and yet he surrenders his private interest for the common good.

One objection that can be raised against Hobbes' philosophy is that he does not make a clear distinction between civil laws and moral laws as he does not make a clear distinction between legal and moral laws. Statute laws are established when the sovereign is there. Similarly, moral laws are there when sovereign comes into being. The sovereign's commands are legal as well as moral laws and to obey them is morally as well as politically obligatory. The covenant which is made between subjects and the sovereign can be political and it becomes moral when the sovereign commands its observance. Thus Hobbes has mixed up political and moral laws.

There is one more objection that can be raised against Hobbes' philosophy. There seems to be some element of totalitarianism in his theory. There are, of course,

many statements from Hobbes which might create this impression. He says:

... the civil sovereignty, and supreme judicature in controversies of manners, are the same thing: and the makers of civil laws, are not only declarers, but also makers of the justice and injustice of actions;...<sup>3</sup>

But it is worth noting that this statement is polemically made against the possibility of accepting the Papal authority as the final arbiter in matters concerning civic life or in ordinary life of the citizens, private or public, as far as the mundane affairs were concerned. Hobbes was writing with the full realization that the domain of public life can not but be put under the authority of the commonwealth because any failure to do it would relegate the public life under the religious authority. The usurpation of the civil authority by the Church was in no circumstances acceptable to Hobbes. And there was no third authority which could substitute for either. The so-called authority of individual conscience either can lead to anarchy of standards of right and wrong, or might lapse into the dominance of religious faith, as more often than not, the voice of conscience has been interpreted as

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3. Lev., EW, Vol. III, pp. 558-59.

the voice of God and men have on many occasions claimed that the claims of their conscience are mere expressions of supernatural inspiration.

It is in this context that he speaks of some 'seditious doctrines' with pernicious and malignant effects for the commonwealth. Hobbes talks of these doctrines in following words:<sup>4</sup>

- (a) "That every private man is judge of Good and Evil actions",
- (b) "That whatsoever a man does against his conscience, is sin..."
- (c) "That faith and Sanctity are not attained by study and Reason, but by supernatural Inspiration or Infusion...."
- (d) "That he that has the sovereign power, is subject to civil laws".

It is surely repugnant to the modern man to think of provision whereby the ruler is above law., But Hobbes was keeping in view the situation wherein the weakening or curtailment of the powers of the ruler by the parliament

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4. Ibid., pp.310-313.

had led to civil war. (But the absolute power of the sovereign was by no means a panacea for civil disorder because there is no guarantee that an absolute ruler might not legislate measures which would run counter to the absolute authority of the ruler. Of course, any sovereign authority can enter into such an unpleasant situation but a representative government, or a parliamentary system can have more checks against such a self-defeating possibility than the whims of any individual monarch can ever have).

(e) "That every private man has an absolute propriety in his Goods, such as excludes the Right of the Sovereign."

(f) "That the Sovereign Power may be divided."

But all the above statements of Hobbes must be seen in the background of his effort to pre-empt any effort to weaken the authority of the sovereign in which he saw the danger of anarchy and civil war. But if we remember that the sovereign is the product of a mutual contract among people it would follow that the absolute power rests with the people rather than the sovereign himself. Even Hobbes himself did grant the possibility that if the sovereign fails to offer security to subjects he could be

over-thrown. The fundamental law of nature did set a limit to the authority of the sovereign. Hobbes, of course, says:

Before there was any government, just and unjust had no being, their nature only being relative to some command: and every action in its own nature is indifferent; that it becomes just or unjust, proceeds from the right of the magistrate.<sup>5</sup>

He even grants such legislative authority and competence to the sovereign that every act of the sovereign is law-making by virtue of being performed by the supreme authority of the sovereign. For the same reason, Hobbes suggests that the sovereign makes "the things they command just, by commanding them and those which they forbid, unjust, by forbidding them." Hobbes indeed takes here a purely legalistic concept of justice according to which the only criterion of just actions is their conformity to law and that of unjust being contrary to law. Hence, the commandments or the law-enacting pronouncements of the sovereign become, in common mode of expression, identical with law itself. The language Hobbes often uses has a tendency to inflate the authority of the sovereign beyond the reasonable proportion of his theory. But, as it is

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5. Philosophical Rudiments, EW, Vol. II, p.151.



evident from some other statements from Leviathan and other works of Hobbes, justice is not merely created or enforced by the sovereign. He also talks as if the sovereign is under certain obligation towards his subjects as regards the propagation of justice. He says: "Every Sovereign Ought to cause Justice to be taught."<sup>6</sup>

It is worth noting that Hobbes is using the term 'ought' in relation to the sovereign whereas, as we have seen earlier, it is the sovereign who creates the 'ought' or obligation. It is no doubt true that the furtherance of justice is an important requisite for the establishment of the authority of the sovereign. But within Hobbes' theory of **commonwealth**, the sovereign reflects the will of the people over whom he establishes his authority and lordship. Moreover, when he talks of the criterion of a good law he finds none other than the good of the people. He is quite explicit on this point. He says:

A good law is that, which is needful, for  
good of the people, and withal perspicuous.<sup>7</sup>

Hobbes surely does not admit the possibility of an unjust law because a law, by definition is just, but in

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6. Lev., EW, Vol. III, p.329.

7. Ibid., p.335.

the above statement the phrase 'good law' does mean 'just law' in common prevalence of the term. Explaining his above stated contention about 'a good law' he further continues:

... the use of laws, (which are but rules authorised) is not to bind people from all voluntary actions; but to direct and keep them in such a motion, as not to hurt themselves by their own impetuous desires, rashness or indiscretion... a law that is not needful, having not the true end of a law, is not good. A law may be conceived to be good, when it is for the benefit of the sovereign; though it be not necessary for the people; but it is not so. For the good of the sovereign and people, cannot be separated.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, as the sovereign is established by the consent of people so it represents peoples' will. Effectively the government is neither authoritarian nor totalitarian because the sovereign works not for himself but for **the** interest of **his** subjects. The interests of the subjects and the sovereign cannot be separated. 'But can this be practically possible?' is a question to be asked. Practically speaking, the sovereign is indeed the absolute authority. The subject has authorized all his actions to him and he has obliged himself to obey the sovereign's commands. The subjects transfer all their rights, powers or their wills

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8. Ibid., pp. 335-36.

to the sovereign. The leviathan draws all his authority from his subjects. Therefore what is justice is what is prescribed by the law and these laws are made by the sovereign who is the sole authority. As Hobbes says:

"The legislator in all commonwealths, is only the sovereign.... none can abrogate a law made, but the sovereign." And the sovereign is not subject to civil law.

For having power to make, and repeal laws, he may when he pleaseth, free himself from that subjection, by repealing those laws that trouble him, and making of new; and consequently he was free before.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in practice the sovereign can be a totalitarian and he can prescribe only those laws which are in his interest whether subjects are benefited by them or not. In theory there is no place for the 'privileged elite' in Hobbes' society. A government founded on mutual consent will be both rational and legitimate.

We have earlier noted that Hobbes accepts rule-utilitarianism i.e. actions are judged according to the rules and not according to the consequences. But Hobbes does not discuss the point that if there is conflict of

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9. Ibid., p.252.

rules i.e. a person is not able to decide which rule to follow, then what is the way out. He cannot, of course, act according to the consequences of the actions. In this situation can we take Toulmin's position that if there is a conflict we should develop a 'rule of life', a 'personal code' with the help of which, we can choose between different courses of action? In developing this rule of life we have, of course, not only our own experiences to guide us, we have the records which others have left of their attempts, failures and successes in the same quest, and the advice of friends and relatives to help us, or can we adopt some other position? Clarification of this point will take us into further development of his utilitarian theory. We have not been able to go deeper into this problem but it appears quite plausible to hold that common good, peace and security and the underlying principles which can be appealed to in deciding between alternative courses of action in such conflicting situations that we have in mind. A rule-utilitarian has merely the refuge to apply the test of general good or well being to his principles.

Hobbes' views on the language of passions also deserves detailed analysis and examination though we could not take it up. It may, however suffice here to note that

Hobbes recognizes the following different modes of expressions of passions which have close affinity with his views on moral language.<sup>10</sup>

(a) "... generally all passions may be expressed indicatively; as I love, I fear, I joy, I deliberate, I will, I command. "

(b) There is also an aspect of choice and decision (which Hobbes assimilates with passions) whereby every act of choosing and deciding is preceded by deliberation. As is obvious, an act of deliberation is a species of practical reasoning where knowledge of specific situation, the facts of the case under consideration and knowledge of general causal relations and laws enable one to infer the possibility and propriety of specific actions. In the language of Kant, here we are mostly concerned with problematic hypothetical imperatives. Hobbes says:

Deliberation is expressed Subjunctively; which is a speech proper to signify supposition, with their consequences; as, if this be done, then this will follow.

(c) "The language of Desire, and Aversion, is Imperative; as do this, forbear that; which when the party is obliged

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10. Ibid., pp. 49 - 50.

to do, or forbear, is command; otherwise prayer; or else counsel". In other words, Hobbes seeks to assert that desires, urges or wants are always object - referring or action-referring or both. When the attainment of what one desires or wants necessarily involves some action on the part of others, one will issue second-person imperative or command or request whereby the addressee will be required to do something or to bring something into effect. But more significant than this is the realization that my desire or want involves a first-person imperative. 'I desire...' or 'I want....', in most cases, would imply, the imperative, 'I ought...' Even if this 'ought' is not coupled with any definite act of doing or acquiring something (in cases where nothing is written by power or ability), it may, nevertheless, involve the awareness as well as the necessity, to affirm that 'I ought to command...' or 'I ought to request...'.

(d) "The language of vain-glory, of indignation, pity and revengefulness, Optative". Hobbes is obviously using the term 'optative' in a sense, narrower than the grammarians would like it to be assigned. Generally speaking, the term 'optative' refers to any judgement or sentence expressing wish. Vainglory, indignation, pity and revengefulness are not the only states characterized by wish.

What Hobbes has probably in his mind is the passivity or the absence of the desire or decision to act which is sometimes expressed in certain utterances made in a fit of anger or hatred e.g., 'I wish he was doomed', 'I wish the heaven falls'. etc. The emotions and passions Hobbes has in mind in the above statement are given vent to in some wish-like expressions without having any desire to couple them with appropriate actions.

(e) Lastly, 'the desire to know' is said to be expressed in interrogative form. To include the 'desire to know' among the passions surely betrays a queer use either of 'desire to know' or of 'passion'. In some cases desire of knowledge may be called a passion, but it may not be true of all occurrences of 'desire to know'. A further explication of what is here meant by Hobbes might warrant a proper analysis of how he understood the term 'desire'. But within the constraints of time and the scope of the present study, this could not be accomplished.

Similarly, an elaborate discussion of the relations among pleasure, desire and good would have also thrown much light on the various aspects of his ethical theory as well as on his theory of language (and chiefly, on his theory of moral language). We are, however, painfully

conscious of these limitations from which the present study suffers.

It may, however, be noted that Hobbes' views on moral language **are** ultimately connected with what he has to say concerning the language of passions. The close connection between morals and passions transfers some of the peculiar features of the latter to the former. Likewise, what he has said regarding the language of passions also lends colour to his theory of moral language. It goes a long way in shaping his views on moral language. The imperative and optative uses of language of passions are reflected in the prescriptivity of moral language. As we have earlier seen, Hobbes does recognize certain specific uses of language which are woven into his concept of the language of ethics. But he has the credit of synthesising the prescriptivity of moral language with the utilitarian theory of ethics whereby moral prescriptions are grounded in objective and universalisable rules of public utility.

Before we conclude our study, we think it may be worth its while to make a few suggestions which not only express some of the weaknesses in Hobbes' philosophy but also suggest further possibilities of developing or reformulating some of Hobbes' philosophical ideas.



A classification is done with some purposes; otherwise it will be only an intellectual exercise. Hobbes makes many classifications of names, but from the point of view of a philosophy of language, some of his classifications do not serve any purpose. When we classify names, the classification has to be based on some criterion. Some of the classifications that Hobbes makes are based on the nature of the things for which the names stand. That does not seem to be a proper classification. The way every name has relations with the objects for which it stands is the same in all cases. As far as the things ( or ideas) named are concerned, every thing (or idea ) is different from another thing ( or idea); therefore, the difference we search for, in different things named, will be unimportant as far as the classification of names is concerned. Nevertheless, the arbitrary signs that will be used to stand for any thing (or idea) will be different from one another; therefore, any criterion that distinguishes different signs will not be a proper criterion. What appears to be a proper criterion of classification of names is to be found in the difference which names show as names, that is, the difference in the logical nature of names. The logical behavior of proper names is different from that of common names in several significant respects:

- (1) no proper name can be a predicate in a speech, though

any common name can be both subject and predicate of a speech, (2) a proper name stands for only one thing, whereas, a common name stands for many (in any case not one) things at the same time. Therefore, the classification of names into "proper" and "common" seems to be important from the point of view of philosophy of language.

In order to make Hobbes' philosophy of language less misleading and more clear, it is advisable to drop the notion of "idea". Possible confusions that arise are the following: (1) 'idea' may be misunderstood to be a psychological 'image', (2) an idea of a proper name may be confused with an idea of a common name and vice versa. Hobbes talks of an image, this or that coming to one's mind. However, he denies the possibility of the image of a common name. This is a psychological aspect of what happens when a man hears a common name. This psychological event which generally goes along with our process of understanding of any word, is not necessary. For example, for Hobbes, "future" has no image which can come to one's mind when one hears this word, for images are possible only of perceived objects, or imagined objects; and it is not difficult for a man to understand the word "future" without forming any one particular image or any image of

future. What Hobbes understands by 'proper name' can be properly represented by using the same term, but what he understands by 'common name' can be represented by using the term "concept". By using different terminologies we will be in a better position to understand Hobbes and will be able to appreciate him.

What is the need to talk of "propositions" in Hobbesian framework? The role of propositions is explicit where the attributes "true" and "false" cannot be used for sentences, but something else: meaning of the sentence, or what a sentence expresses etc. Hobbes does not mean by "speech" the same thing as we mean by a "sentence"; we talk of meaning of a sentence independent of the use of a sentence, but a speech is one which is used or uttered with some purpose: communication of ideas, amusing oneself or others etc. We choose or select words according to the function we want them to perform. That is to say, the meaning of speeches cannot be understood without taking into consideration the communication situation which includes the intention of the speaker. "Speech" can be best compared to what Strawson calls "use of a sentence" i.e. both for Hobbes and Strawson, a statement can be called 'true' or 'false' only in the sense of a sentence when it is used.

However, it is not very clear whether Strawson would also attribute meaning to statements, like Hobbes, **does**, though he does to sentences. For all logical and philosophical purposes one can use "speeches" instead of "propositions" in Hobbes' scheme. "Propositions" are redundant and they can be eliminated by using Ockham's razor.

We believe that Hobbes' semantic theory of truth can be brought out more forcefully and can be made more acceptable. In doing this one has to go deeper into the notions of speech, extension and social conventions regarding a language.

Hobbes has developed a method of reasoning in the case of descriptive statements on the lines Aristotle did though Hobbes differs from Aristotle in certain respects. But there is much scope to develop a method of reasoning in the case of morals. On the one hand, ~~Stevensonian~~ method of moral reasoning can be arrived at from Hobbes' by developing emotive aspects of moral terms. On the other hand, Hare's method of moral reasoning can be arrived at from Hobbes' writings by making use of both indicative and prescriptive aspects of moral concepts. Like Hare, Hobbes also distinguishes the indicative aspects of ethical terms from their prescriptive and emotive aspects. It is very likely that if we develop Hobbes' method of reasoning in the case

of morals, we will be working on the lines of Hare. What 'phrastics' play in moral reasoning in Hare's method, perhaps will be played by 'extension' in case of Hobbes'. The validity of inference seems to depend on the extensions of moral concepts, and we have to add appropriate evaluative aspects of the terms in the conclusion which are present in at least one of the premises.

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